



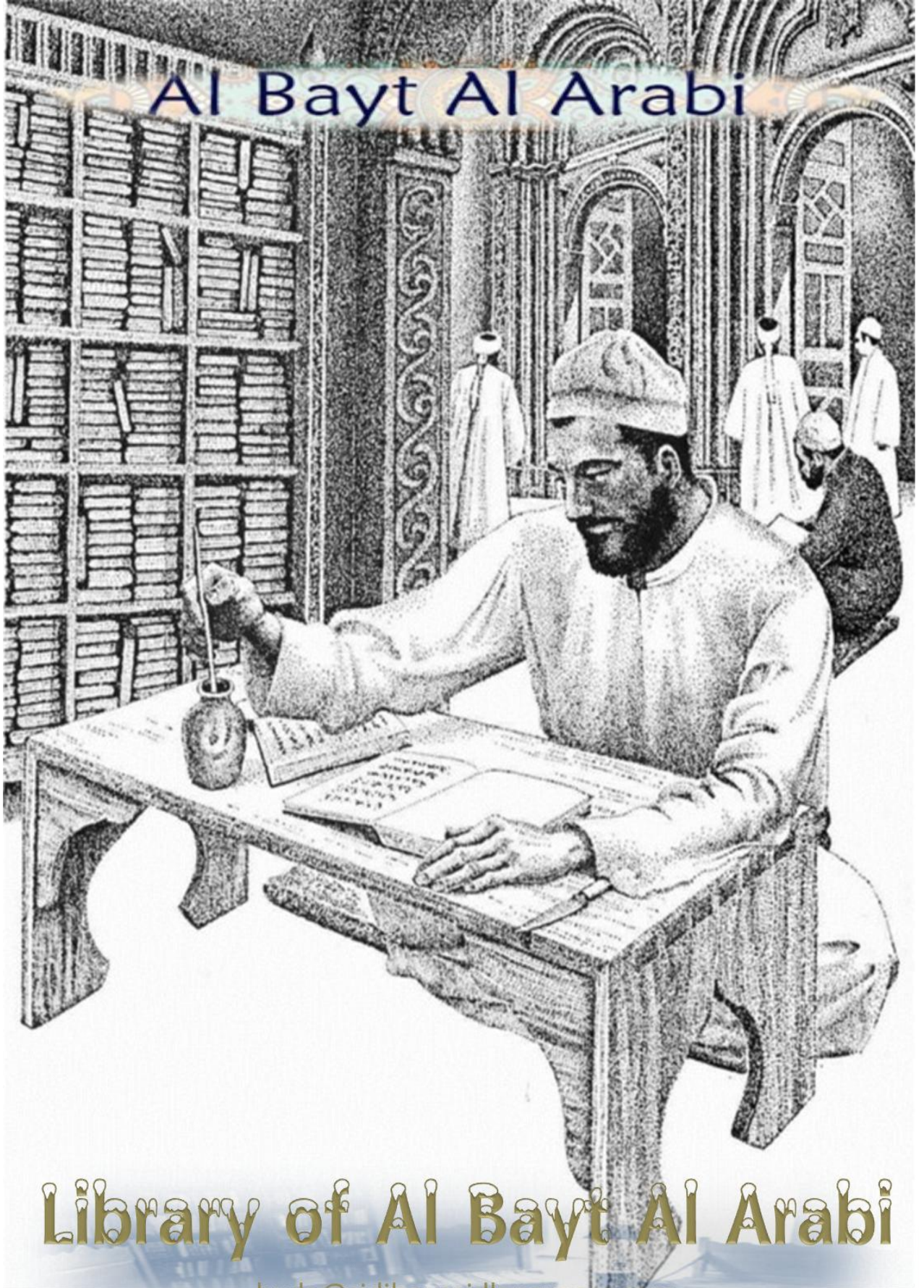
THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGY in SYRIAN-US RELATIONS Conflict and Cooperation



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The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations: Conflict and Cooperation

J. K. Gani

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Syrian-US Relations
Conflict and Cooperation**

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Acronyms

AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
Aramco	Arabian American Oil Company
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COS	Chief of Staff
DMZ	demilitarized zone
ERP	European Reconstruction Program
FO	Foreign Office (British Government)
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
MEC	Middle East Command
NA	National Archives
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NSC	National Security Council
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
POW	prisoner of war
SD	State Department (United States Government)
Tapline	Trans Arabian Pipeline Company
TWA	Trans World Airlines (American)
UAR	United Arab Republic
UN	United Nations
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
USINT	United States Intelligence
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Finally, as ever, *alhamdulillah, wa al-shukrulillah*.

Introduction

A deadly chemical weapon attack in August 2013 on innocent civilians in the Syrian town of Ghouta sparked off an international crisis in which Syrian-American relations reached a new nadir. Accusing the Syrian government of crossing its “red line,” Washington attempted to rally international support for military strikes against the regime, focusing attention on its human rights abuses and the threat Syria posed to the national security of the United States and its allies. Damascus responded with condemnations against American imperialist aggression and threatened the United States with an uncontrollable conflagration of conflict in the region.

The episode was a culmination of deep-seated divisions played out in the United Nations Security Council since the start of the Syrian uprisings in 2011; it marked a dramatic deterioration of relations since the start of Barack Obama’s presidency, which saw attempts to bridge the chasm that had developed between the governments of Bashar Asad and George W. Bush. Both Asad and Bush had entered office only six months apart in 2000 and 2001, but despite similar attempts at rapprochement, relations over the decade were variously described as “estranged,” “hostile,” “tense,” “dire,” “very strained,” and characterized by “outright mutual hostility” and “mistrust.”¹ Syria refused to relinquish its strong alliance with Iran and support for Hamas and Hizbullah, all of which it saw as partners in its resistance against Israel and “western imperialism,” while the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 gave the Syrian government a renewed and potent cause for hostility toward the United States. Meanwhile, Washington excluded Syria from regional diplomacy, renewed old sanctions against Syria, and bracketed it among other “rogue states.” Syria was regularly accused of sponsoring terrorism, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon, and was singled out for censure in Washington’s drive for democratization in the Middle East.

Given the above, it is easy to view the causes of poor relations between Syria and the United States through the prism of recent history and short-term catalysts—be it the Iraq War, the 2011 uprisings in Syria, or simply bad diplomacy from Obama, Bush, or Asad. But taking a more long-term approach reveals a remarkably consistent hostility between

the states, regularly punctuated by brief periods of attempted but failed rapprochement.² For all the initial optimism and introspection offered by the incoming Obama administration in 2009, it was still constrained by old strategic and ideological calculations entrenched since the Cold War. And for all the hopes the United States had that Bashar Asad would be more positively inclined toward the West on account of his British education and relative youth, the greatest influence on the Syrian president was the legacy of his father's rule and Syria's experience of colonialism.

To understand the intensity of suspicion and the deeper causes of the antipathy that erupts between Syria and the United States at the turn of each crisis in the Middle East, it is necessary to look beyond the events under recent governments to the even more turbulent events of the last century. Although initially positive, US-Syrian relations turned sour after the onset of the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict. With increased instances of US intervention (such as the attempted coup against Iran's Mossadeq in 1953, and the Omega policy to discredit Nasser), much of the earlier goodwill that Syrians felt toward the United States was eroded. The Syrian-American crisis in 1957, in which the United States planned (but failed) to organize a coup against the weak and pro-Soviet Syrian government, established Syria's lasting perceptions of the United States as "second-generation imperialists."

The Arab-Israeli War in 1967 marked a turning point in Syria's regional role and importance to the United States. With Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights, Syria became directly engaged in a conflict with Israel and would have a crucial role to play in the region, with the choice of either facilitating or "obstructing" US mediation and intervention. In the 1973 war against Israel, Egypt and Syria hoped to retrieve their respective territories and increase their bargaining powers in negotiations. After separate negotiations with Israel, and with US help, Egypt succeeded in its aim; Syria, in contrast, did not. Egypt's "defection" and the United States' blind eye to Israel's post-1967 war borders shifted Syria's position toward the United States from one of cautious opposition to open provocation and hostility.

Thus, Syria went on to be the first state to openly support and sponsor radical guerrilla factions in Lebanon (even before the formation of Hizbullah); it was the first state to acknowledge the revolutionary government in Tehran in 1979, and was the only Arab state to openly support the militants in the Iranian hostage crisis. In turn, the United States placed Syria on its list of state sponsors of terrorism in 1979 and terminated financial aid and trading with Syria.

Consequently, Syria forged a new role for itself in the region, as an opponent of US policies, obstructing Israeli interests where possible without

risking its own survival. Syria's support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988 (in which the United States armed and supported Iraq), and Syria's funding and supplying of arms to Hizbullah and Hamas against Israel are key examples of Syria's consistent opposition toward US policy in the Middle East for over 50 years—long predating the policies of recent governments.

Aims of This Study

The primary purpose of this book is to analyze the legacy of mistrust and the driving factors in Syrian-American relations in the past: both the continuities of hostility—distinctive in the context of the region's dynamic political landscape—and the rarer instances of cooperation. It is only against this long-term backdrop that we can fully understand the aforementioned crisis in US-Syrian relations in 2013 and the broader international standoff over the Syrian conflict. While events and catalysts of dramatic change in the region routinely attract academic attention, the importance of continuities in Middle East politics should not be overlooked. If this was already true for Syrian-American relations prior to 2011, it has become urgently necessary since the start of the Syrian conflict, which has spawned speculative short-termism in both explanations and resolutions.

A second aim of the book is to redress the relative dearth of scholarly literature on Syrian-American relations. There is plenty of literature that looks separately at US and Syrian foreign policies in the region, but there are very few in-depth studies on bilateral relations between the two states.³ Despite the volatility and changing political landscape of the Middle East region, Syria has stood out as having a particularly consistent foreign policy agenda, especially in its opposition toward American policy in the region, over a long time frame. It predates Iran's dispute with the United States by several decades, and has outlived the previously antagonistic positions of Egypt, Libya, and Iraq. Syria's pivotal role in the region, often overlooked when compared to its more populous or wealthier neighbors, means its relationship with the United States warrants greater scrutiny than it has received to date.

The gap in scholarship on US-Syrian relations, when compared to US-Egyptian, US-Iranian, or US-Saudi relations, reflects the United States' own position toward Syria over the years, which has typically been ambivalent and fairly dismissive—prevailing views in the policy world regarding what issues are of high and low salience infiltrate and are reflected in academic output as well. Moreover, better access to and availability of

American sources that convey the US viewpoint can strongly shape the perspective and argument of scholarship. Given this trend, this book seeks to challenge a US-centric account, which dominates much of the literature on US foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Finally, the book analyzes the importance of ideational factors in Syrian-American relations. In doing so, this study challenges the dominant narrative on the role of Arab nationalism in the Middle East, and the broadly realist explanations of both Syrian and American policies in the region and toward each other. The book adopts and offers a historicized conceptual framework for the study of ideologies and their influence on foreign policies in general, as will shortly be discussed in more detail.

Key Questions

In view of these aims, four key questions underpin and guide the analysis in this book. It is important to note that the framing of a question depends on which side one stands, and the assumptions one chooses to accept as a starting premise. When seeking to understand their mutual hostility, the burden of scrutiny in academic and policy discourse has tended to fall upon Syria rather than the United States; this is in itself indicative of prevailing assumptions about the two states. Usually Syria is cross-examined from an external perspective, while the United States carries the mantle of neutrality, merely responding to Syria's self-constructed opposition. However, it is possible, and indeed important, to also pose questions from the opposite angle and turn the scrutiny onto US policies, analyzing how they have shaped and affected Syria's position. The following questions reflect these two different standpoints, as both ought to be given consideration:

1. Why has Syria regularly opposed the United States and its policies in the Middle East? And to what extent has the United States contributed to ongoing hostility between the two states?
2. To what extent was Syria, as often argued by its opponents, an obstructionist force in the region—a “spoiler” in any Middle East peace process and barrier to improved Arab-Israeli relations? Or, to what extent did the United States allow its global concerns and its rivalry with the Soviet Union to disproportionately color its view of Syria during and after the Cold War? Did the United States on key occasions presuppose Syrian intransigence and hostility despite Syrian efforts to the contrary?⁴
3. Why did Syria not follow the apparently peaceful route taken by Egypt under Sadat, its more powerful fellow Arab state, with whom

Syria supposedly shares greater ties in identity and history than it does with Iran? Certainly, there are striking similarities between Hafez Asad's Ba'athist Syria and Nasser's Egypt, and their respective relations with the United States, which warrants such a query. Both shared similar ideological and political positions vis-à-vis the United States, and both were compelled to engage more closely with the United States after losing territory to Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Yet, by 1979, their paths dramatically diverged: whereas Egypt was able to forge a long-term alliance with the United States after signing a peace treaty with Israel, Syria's relations with the United States continued to deteriorate. Why Syria's relationship with the United States has followed such a different trajectory from that of Egypt remains a question that has been answered only superficially within the existing literature.

An alternative approach to that question would be to query American expectations and demands of the Arab parties in the various regional peace processes: What were the strategic judgments and interests behind them? How realistic or reasonable were US demands in light of Arab interests and aspirations? Did the United States overestimate Egypt's capacity to influence the likes of Syria? The United States championed Egypt under the Sadat and Mubarak regimes as a model for other states in the region to follow, and afforded it a great deal of power as a regional representative and chief mediator between Israelis and Arabs. But in focusing so narrowly on the Egyptian government, did the United States exclude voices of opposition such as the Syrians', thereby undermining the comprehensiveness of any potential peace plan that would ultimately have to engage such dissenters?

4. To what extent has Syria's opposition to the United States been framed by its alliance with Iran? US policy circles regularly consider what can be done, or what would it take, to coax Syria away from Iran's perceived sphere of influence. However, is it even accurate to view Syria's relations with Iran in this paternalistic light? And while scrutinizing alliances, it is also important to consider the United States' close relationship with Israel: To what extent has this hindered its role as a peace broker in the region, and to what extent has that defined Syria's perceptions of and attitude toward the United States?

The book puts forward the argument that Syria's long-term opposition to the United States and to its foreign policies and presence in the region is not only based on territorial or regime interests, nor only on tactical bandwagoning with its allies, but has also been significantly (though not exclusively)

influenced by ideology. Though recent constructivist debates have (rightly) brought the role of identity back to the fore, ideological or value-laden motives are still at times treated dismissively as an instrument of power politics (particularly in relation to Middle Eastern regimes) or, conversely, as a sign of regime irrationality. The apparent methodological impasse in credibly connecting ideational motives with foreign policy implementation and the perceived incompatibility between ideas and pragmatic decision-making have prevented a deeper and more sophisticated exploration of ideological influences within International Relations (IR). The book seeks to redress this imbalance by considering the way such ideological visions are structured, sustained, and adapted by historical experience, and how they feed into the beliefs and strategic options of both regime and society.

Moreover, it contends that the United States has in the past played a major role in fostering hostile relations with Syria through a policy of marginalization and a pursuit of its own strategic interests above the issues concerning the region. (Mis)perceptions on both sides about each other have fueled the antagonism and consolidated long-standing beliefs, which in turn sustain ideological positions held by both Damascus and Washington. While the book focuses mainly on the role of Syrian ideology and how it relates to the United States, American ideology undoubtedly plays a role here as well.

Methods and Approaches

Historical Analysis

To explore these key themes and questions, the study adopts historical analysis, constructivism, and foreign policy analysis as the main analytical approaches. The most important of these is historical analysis. The book charts a historical narrative of US-Syrian relations over a long time frame, relying predominantly on primary documentation—as Hobden states, “all social interactions are affected by what has gone before, and in the understanding of the present the past cannot be escaped.”⁵ Failure to conduct historical analysis—particularly with a case study that has long-term roots—risks supporting, albeit unwittingly, a political position that legitimates the contemporary status quo. To take the present as the starting point of analysis serves to overlook and downplay the contested, politicized nature of historical narratives; viewing historical changes as though they have become embedded norms, part of the established political landscape that actors need to work within, without applying historical scrutiny, is a normative position in and of itself. For example, to analyze US-Syrian

relations during the years of the second Bush administration alone would be to work on the basis that US sanctions on Syria, Syrian support for Hamas and Hizbullah, and Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights are immutable features of the Middle East. When the status quo is not historicized and is taken as a structural norm, the capacity and potential for change are not given due acknowledgment.

Archival work also enables genuine motives and policies of the Syrian leadership, held in private, to be separated from its public rhetoric. In turn, this is compared with the private statements of Syria's regional counterparts, to demonstrate the divergence in their respective attachments to ideology. It is important to note that much of the archival research is based on US and British sources to extract Syrian opinion and perceptions; the lack of Syrian historical documentation—unrecorded or entirely unavailable for public scrutiny—necessitates this approach. Nevertheless, there is extensive documentation of direct Syrian communication, of its policies, opinions, and domestic situation, held in non-Syrian archives.

Despite these merits of a historical study, there are however potential limitations. Focusing too narrowly on the history of a particular state, society, or event can culminate in a distorted view of their “uniqueness” and limit the study's wider contribution. In order to extend the applicability of history, it needs to be contextualized within a broader framework and compared—be it with other events or states at the same time, or indeed with different chronological periods. This approach, that is, historical sociology, reflects a combination of history (a search for the particular) with theory (a search for what is general). Historical sociology enables us to understand developments not at a given, static time in history, but *over a length of time*.⁶ Thus, it helps to make sense of incremental changes (e.g., in US-Syrian relations) and how certain events, policies, and individuals have contributed to an ever-evolving bilateral relationship.

Theory and the Middle East

For scholars of International Relations, the above approach ties in well with an overarching constructivist methodology in that it recognizes the incremental development of relations. Constructivism also suggests there are multiple levels (not just state-state, but also state-society) that constitute international relations. As such, both constructivist and historical sociological approaches present the formation and shaping of ideas—identities, ideology, and perceptions—as historical *processes*, thus holding off simplistic, essentialist explanations: an important contribution, since to acknowledge the role of ideology in the Middle East while navigating the

argument between the polar (but equally ahistorical) ends of realist and orientalist explanations is indeed a challenge. As both realist and orientalist approaches have dominated the field at different times over the past 50 years, they warrant some attention here.

The first overtly dominant strand was the culturally deterministic route, stemming from philological and anthropological perspectives and generating an exceptionalist view of the region. These studies focused on culture, religion, ideologies, emotion, and the “Arab mind-set” as the drivers behind Middle Eastern foreign policy and social trends. These causal factors are often bracketed as signs of so-called irrationality. They tied in with cultural and even racist stereotypes of the region, positing its leaders and social movements as irrational, unpredictable, or dangerous actors in contrast to the rationality and dispassionate behavior of other, particularly western, international actors.⁷ As a result, the region was widely perceived as resistant and unsuited to the application of generic theories of IR.

While this approach can still be identified in both academia and policy, regional scholars increasingly challenged this exceptionalization of the Middle East, and argued that the theories and patterns of IR were universal and could be applied anywhere, including the Middle East.⁸ In the process of demystifying the Middle East and opening it up to the same modes of social and political enquiry that were applied elsewhere, a flurry of research began to emerge to draw parallels between the Middle East and its global counterparts; of those latter theories being applied to the region, the “realist” paradigm has been the most dominant.

Indeed, on the face of it, the insecurity and volatility of the region appear to justify realist interpretations of foreign policies in the Middle East; the dominance of the state and the lack of institutional cohesion also lend to this view. The rise of International Relations as an academic discipline after the First World War took its cue from contemporary events: the breakup of empires, national self-determination, and institution-building on the basis of nation-states, all encouraged the use of the “state” as the homogeneous unit of analysis in IR;⁹ therefore, the relatively recent imposition of a so-called Westphalian system on the region has meant that it has often been viewed and portrayed, unwittingly or justifiably, as a modern Middle Eastern version of Europe’s prewar “balance of power” system. In this context, in a move away from stereotypes of “irrationality,” ideological factors and specifically Arab nationalism have taken a backseat and are often viewed in a purely instrumentalist light.¹⁰

In such circumstances, from a realist standpoint, the individual state relies on self-help and pursues material and strategic motives that are conducive to its national interests, be that mere survival and defense, or wealth and hegemony.¹¹ The drive is presented as an entirely rational

one—attached to the overriding pursuit for stability, order, and maximization of potential. Competition for resources, regular territorial and border conflicts (Israel-Palestine, Syria-Turkey, Iraq-Iran, Iraq-Kuwait), the perceived instrumentalization, indeed abandonment, of ideology for the sake of state interests or personal rivalries (Egypt-Israeli truce, Syrian-Iranian alliance, Syrian-Iraqi inter-Ba‘thist rivalry), widespread instances of Arab collaboration with the United States and the West against the interests of fellow Arab states, and the failure to unite the Arab region as one political entity, all appear to validate the realist argument. This seemed particularly true after the perceived failure of the pan-Arab project in various regional conflicts, notably in 1967, marking the subsequent decline of Arab nationalism in the Middle East.¹²

Although ideational accounts of foreign policy did begin to emerge at the height of Arab nationalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kenneth Waltz’ seminal work in 1979 on neorealism prompted a strong revival of the centrality of material power within the study of IR in general, this time shifting the emphasis away from individual agency toward a structural, systemic view.¹³ With the publication coinciding with major ruptures and changes in Middle East politics that appeared to endorse the structuralist argument¹⁴ and thanks to its non-exceptionalist appeal,¹⁵ neorealism has been seen for many years as the most suitable interpretive framework for the region, by both mainstream IR and Middle East scholars.¹⁶

Beyond the demise of ideologies, the role of external powers and their capacity to influence the politics of the region is a theme that also fits well within a neorealist interpretation of the Middle East, since it places regional power and influence in the hands of homogenized state actors with the greatest military capabilities. Traditional Cold War narratives vis-à-vis the Middle East places explanatory emphasis on external agency, positing US involvement in the region in the context of the Soviet threat and vice versa. According to this view, Middle East states had little stake in US policy-making toward the region, neither diplomatically, nor by shaping events on the ground; as a result, US relations with individual states in the Middle East, the variance between those relations, the role of society, and the micro-level factors that led to conflict or alignment are largely overlooked, or more commonly overgeneralized in order to cover the region as a homogeneous whole. It is true that US relations with Iran have had more attention than those with most other states due to the added dimension of “political Islam” and the utility of Iran as a thematic case study within that domain. But this specific attention has been extended only sporadically to other bilateral relations with the United States.

There has at times been recognition of the role of prominent Middle East leaders—such as Gamal Abdel Nasser, Hafez Asad, and Saddam

Hussein—considered adept at playing the superpowers off each other during the Cold War, and presented as classic cases of “the tail wagging the dog,” but ultimately in many neorealist analyses those individuals fade into the background, shown to merely play the role of agitators in the far greater, global conflict between the United States and the USSR.¹⁷ The view that foreign policy, wars, and truces are dictated by the need for a balance of power, that the United States and the USSR were the major players in the system, while the smaller states either aligned or remained neutral in the interests of maintaining the balance of power, remains resilient in the field—and in many cases rightly so.

Realism and Syria

Reflecting the general trend in Middle East studies, political realism similarly dominates interpretations of Syrian and American foreign policies in the region. Just as in the policy realm, academic discourse often posits Syria as a follower of Egypt’s example. Under Nasser, Egypt had been seen as the leader of the pan-Arab movement, but with its shift to the “pro-western” camp and the subsequent political and economic gains that it made, scholars predicted similar repercussions for the entire region.¹⁸ Syria as a fellow “revisionist” state was expected to be the most severely affected; its disillusionment with Egypt and the pan-Arab movement was translated as a dilution of its own ideological drive.

Goodarzi, among others, positions Hafez Asad alongside Egypt’s Anwar Sadat: both political pragmatists who helped to usher in a new phase of *realpolitik* at the expense of ideology.¹⁹ In turn, Syria’s foreign policies, specifically those toward the United States, have been interpreted as straightforward geopolitical pursuits,²⁰ matching the United States’ interest-driven policy toward the region as a whole. Thus, defensive, territorial concerns for Syria (retrieving the Golan Heights from Israel and preventing hostile encirclement by its neighbors) and hegemonic, security interests for the United States (counterbalancing Soviet influence during the Cold War, safeguarding access to oil, and eliminating terrorist threats post-Cold War) are deemed to constitute their respective bilateral priorities in both diplomatic and confrontational settings.²¹

Alongside defensive-realist explanations, there are also numerous arguments based on Syria’s need to protect regime security at home. Thus, if Syrian political rhetoric appears to display an intense ideological motivation behind its policies, it is to be remembered that it is just that: rhetoric. According to Roger Owen, Syria has at times used extreme ideological language, not even for the purpose of regional legitimization, but in fact

to make it too dangerous for any other state to feasibly unite with its policy—in this way, he argues, Syria is assured that it never needs to follow through its empty threats and belligerent rhetoric.²² Others argue, on the basis of its ruthless domestic authoritarianism, that the regime is merely motivated by the need to maintain its own security, and wealth.²³ Fred Lawson argues that the desire to protect the regime at home leads to the exploitation of events abroad to create a perpetual state of emergency and to smother potential dissent.²⁴

Hinnebusch and Ehteshami's analysis acknowledges the resilient hostility between the United States and Syria, describing the latter as one of the few remaining revisionist powers in the world, alongside Iran.²⁵ However, they stipulate that this revisionism is *not* an ideological one, but one that is based on systemic factors and the need to balance power in the region. Bureaucratic politics, exemplified by tensions between economic pragmatists and less-progressive ideologues, are portrayed as the main driving force behind outward revisionism, rather than an inherent ideological bent. They point to the ascendancy of pragmatists such as Hafez Asad to corroborate the notion that there has been a dilution of ideology in Syrian foreign policy, certainly the revolutionary ideology that characterized the unstable Syrian regime before Asad's seizure of power in 1970. It is argued that the shift from a weak, fragmented, ideologically driven state to a strong centralized actor is in great part attributable to the authoritarianism and *realism* of Hafez Asad.

Overall, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, having debated the possibilities, present Syrian foreign policy as a rational one, reacting to the penetration of external global hegemons and interstate regional war, one that co-opts a degree of domestic-external "omni-balancing" to allow for bureaucratic politics, the need for public legitimacy, and, above all, the retention of relative autonomy for the leadership.²⁶ In many respects, this analysis of Syrian foreign policy does challenge the realist account (it certainly opens up the proverbial "black box" to look at internal politics), but in terms of motives, it is still very much tied to material interests.

And finally, in line with a Cold War, neorealist analysis that places global hegemons at the center of regional politics, Syria has often been portrayed to have swung between nonaligned status and being a satellite of the USSR and latterly Russia; as such, it possessed little independent agency, being dependent on and swayed by its more powerful Soviet ally, or by the constraints of the system itself and the necessity of military equilibrium.

To sum up, in a realist assessment of US-Syrian relations, ideology can act as a supplementary force and is used as a vehicle for legitimacy and mobilization; however, it is not to be seen as an indication of genuinely held values but as a "disguise" of the leader's true power-political motives.²⁷

Thus, ideology takes a backseat to what are perceived as more substantial and urgent material interests. From the literature we can extract four key realist assumptions that have dominated any analysis of Syria's foreign policy, and by extension US-Syrian relations. These assumptions undermine the role of ideology in Syria's policy toward the United States:

1. There has been a decline in Syrian Arab nationalist ideology following Egypt's truce with the West.
2. Syria's grievances with the United States, and Israel, would dissipate should Syria's own territorial dispute with Israel be resolved.
3. Syria's authoritarianism means all power and decision-making resides with the president—its foreign policy merely reflects his personal motives and need for regime security.
4. Reflecting the pragmatism of a regime merely interested in its own survival, Syria bandwagons or balances against external and regional hegemons and is swayed by fluctuations in the international system.

In support of these assumptions, periods of temporary cooperation between the two states—such as a tacit agreement during the Lebanese Civil War; the 1990–1991 Gulf War, when Syria aligned with the United States against a fellow Arab nation; and post 9/11, when the United States sought and received Syrian intelligence for its “War on Terror”—are explained through the realist paradigm of self-help and disregard for normative constraints. As such, these instances of cooperation need not be viewed in a paradoxical light, as inconsistency and flexibility are the defining characteristics of pragmatist regimes.

Bringing Back Ideas

The strength and utility of a realist perspective when analyzing the Middle East cannot and should not be dismissed outright. However, this should not prevent it from being critiqued in the face of historical inaccuracies and failures to consider societal complexities. The arguments and assumptions outlined above can be challenged on a number of fronts—these will be elucidated throughout the book, and it will be demonstrated that there are, at best, missing components to a purely realist explanation of the US-Syrian case.

While this study outlines the insufficiency of a purely realist understanding of US-Syrian relations, it does not seek to provide a theoretical critique of the realist paradigm itself—this has been attempted thoroughly

and expertly by others; indeed, realist-materialist frameworks retain such vigor precisely because they are regularly challenged. Instead, the book seeks to positively highlight the salience of, and potential in, incorporating an ideational perspective in analyzing US-Syrian relations, without necessarily excluding materialist arguments altogether.

As suggested earlier, the first place one might look in order to bring in an ideational component is constructivism and identity studies. Identity certainly forms a key part of the ideational argument here, but it does not constitute the full picture. Part of the continued problem in bringing identity into foreign policy analysis is that it appears to detract from the agency of decision-making and places emphasis on social structures and embedded norms, while their precise influence on policy cannot be tracked easily. This ambiguity and epistemological problem is oftentimes seen to hinder the credibility of an ideational framework. Moreover, it means analysts may find themselves falling back on nonrational explanations for foreign policies in the Middle East, and an unwelcome return to the earlier stereotypes of the “Arab mind-set.”

In order to understand the intentionality behind a given policy from an ideational angle, ideology—in the broadest sense of the term—needs to be brought back into the debate. When it comes to understanding the ideas that influence Syrian policy toward the United States, identity alone does not produce and direct action. It is, however, a vital component within an adaptable Arab nationalist ideology, which has both captured and shaped the experiences, political aspirations, and outlook of Syria’s political class and wide sections of its society. Arab nationalism’s initial emergence as a sociopolitical movement among both elites and the rank and file in Syria means it has played an important part in Syrian history and thus supplies Syria’s pan-Arab identity. Thus, instead of separating identity from ideology, it can be argued that in this case, to adhere to ideological values is an affirmation of identity and vice versa.

While the discipline has accepted identity into the fold, it maintains an uneasy relationship with ideology. IR scholars face the following dilemma if they wish to employ ideology as part of any foreign policy analysis, particularly in relation to the Middle East: on the one hand, ideologies are considered as a dogmatic force in politics, thereby incapacitating actors when there is a need to compromise, even when the state’s security and national interests are at stake. To pursue ideological goals at all costs is therefore branded as radical, illogical—once again, irrational. On the other hand, if the actor is deemed to be acting rationally, then ideologies are seen as instrumental tools used to mask the reality of self-interest and personal gain. In other words, to be rational and genuinely influenced by ideology is seen as an incompatible position.

The first view takes us back to essentialist espousals found in orientalist literature, with connotations that his/her emotiveness prevents an actor from making the “right” choices, reached through a scientific process. The second option falls back on realist, and also Marxist, outlooks that only power politics matter, while ideas are merely used to sell policies to the masses. To exemplify the difficulty IR has had with the concept and the confusion over it, one finds that *both* these alternative viewpoints have been applied to the Syrian case. The neo-Ba‘thist regime that came to power in the revolution of 1966 and took the country to the unsuccessful war of 1967 is widely held to characterize the first position; meanwhile, the post-Asad era is often cited as an example of the latter view.

Indeed, Hafez Asad is considered to have been a calculated and pragmatic ruler, in many respects because of a perceived willingness to sacrifice ideology for the sake of political and strategic objectives; given that Asad’s rule brought stability to a previously weak and unstable country, this pragmatism earned him, and Syria, grudging respect from his international counterparts and even enemies. The tactics he employed in negotiations and the ability to balance a number of precarious situations at home were deemed as anything but a show of irrationality. The ruthlessness with which he dispatched his domestic foes gave Asad a reputation as a Machiavellian, rather than an idealist holding on to any “altruistic” Arab nationalist doctrine. Asad’s pragmatism meant Syria acquired a new reputation for caution and strategic prowess, and could not as easily be dismissed on the grounds of radicalism and irrationality, labels that had in the past undermined the stature and credibility of Syria as an international actor.

Thus, it transpires that for many Syrians too—in politics or academia²⁸—to be labeled as ideological has pejorative connotations and something that representatives of the regime have at times been keen to disassociate themselves and Syria from. Moreover, to be seen as an ideological actor too often provided opponents with a reason to avoid engagement with Syria, a trend that was detrimental to Syria’s goals and interests. Pragmatism, then, has become the byword for competent and mature government.

However, regardless of the image various parties want to construct for Syria, public disassociation from ideology—be that Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism, Ba‘thism, or any other *ism* used to describe it—belies the ideational component in Syria’s foreign policy and relations with the United States. Having said this, it is true to say that the way in which ideology influences policy is far more nuanced than is often portrayed. Moreover, *what* the ideology actually entails and the contexts in which it becomes relevant also need to be studied and clarified, especially as

simplistic generalizations have contributed to some of the problems with studying ideology, outlined above. Indeed, part of the reason why there is a reluctance to turn to ideology as an explanatory factor is that it is almost always portrayed as inconducive to adaptation and unable to respond to changes in the international system. This would be particularly indicting in the Middle East context, which has seen regime changes and shifts in patterns of alliance and enmity.

What is required is a reassessment of the *nature* of ideologies, how they are integrated with other, non-ideational, goals and motives, and how they influence any decision-making process. This book posits that ideologies should be viewed as an evolutionary and flexible set of political *principles* and *values* that inform and guide, rather than fix, foreign policy. Moreover, ideologies do not necessarily contradict state interests and can in fact support goals for security, political kudos, and identity. In this sense, pragmatism, as in Syria's case, need not be viewed as something that is dichotomous to its ideological principles.

Typology of Ideology and Defining Arab Nationalism

All ideologies can be found to be predicated on a typology of seven defining features:

1. Ideology is a set of both explanatory and normative beliefs pertaining to society and politics.
2. Ideology is also an expression of human agency and intent, but particularly moral intent in the minds of its adherents. Thus, ideologies are utopian, but are also manifested as active social and political movements that promote idealism as a realizable objective.
3. Ideologies tend to be promoted as universal messages.
4. Despite the universalizing nature of ideologies, there are always competing and varying narratives within them, creating an internal pluralism in which ideas both oppose and overlap, giving a greater complexity to the broader concept upon which they are based. This means there can be different interpretations of, and within, the same ideology, which can focus on different issues at different times. There may be core and peripheral concepts, which can in turn create an overlap with competing or neighboring ideologies, but they all still constitute the ideology as a whole.
5. Ideologies are not timeless, essential concepts, but are constituted by their broader social contexts. Thus, the principles and goals that shape them cannot be abstracted from the spatial, temporal, and

sociopolitical contingencies that are always reconfiguring ideologies. Consequently, ideologies can undergo adaptation and transition and will shift over time. This does not negate the role of ideologies, or necessarily reflect a crude manipulation on the part of ideologists to suit and pursue their own interests. Rather, it demonstrates that ideologies need not be rendered obsolete by sociopolitical change or pragmatic realities, nor indeed are these concepts mutually exclusive.

6. As far as it is possible to make a clear demarcation between politics, society, culture, and economics, ideologies are not confined to the realm of politics. Rather, ideologies politicize all the above spheres.
7. Finally, ideologies are dependent on societal co-option; in other words, they are, or at least their proponents seek to transform them into, popular movements. Analyses of ideological influences often become hoisted on the role of the leadership without giving due consideration to the connection between the regime and the populace in conducting ideologically oriented policies. The justification and continued relevance of any ideological agenda rests on the transmission of ideological values from top to bottom for the sake of legitimacy, but this also works the other way around through a bottom-up process: the executive is reassured and encouraged in its ideological zeal by popular mandate, even in authoritarian systems. Regardless of how removed an ideology may be from this overriding principle in praxis, it must retain the collective element in order to even exist—indeed, the success of any ideology is determined by “the degree to which they [articulate] with social movements.”²⁹

The use of this typology enables us to identify the difference between ideology and identity, or ideology and mere interests. Moreover, it also allows us to dismiss some of the misnomers that are at times used to negate the presence of ideologies in a given situation. If we apply the typology to Arab nationalism in a Syrian context, we can ascertain how it reflects the above ideological tenets:

1. Arab nationalism is rooted in the historical experience of external interference in the region, particularly after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It offers its own explanations on why the Middle East went through so much turmoil in the beginning of the twentieth century, and why the region continues to experience seemingly intractable problems (namely colonialism and exploitation of its resources and strategic assets). The mantle of imperialism is seen to have been taken on by Israel after the Europeans had departed. The ideology also serves a normative function in prescribing the

antidote to this problem: opposition to all external interference and imperialist ideologies, in all their guises.

2. Syria's Arab nationalism is also more than just a reflection of identity. Identity is seen as something that is acquired without choice, whereas adherence to Arab nationalist ideology is a conscious choice. Arab identity is a key component of Arab nationalism, but not all Arabs will necessarily be Arab nationalist. Moreover, Arab nationalism was conceived as a reflection of moral agency and a just movement against forces of oppression—particularly external forces.
3. Arab nationalism is not universal in the sense that it is concerned with a particular geographical region. But Arab nationalists have tended to view the region's politics in a Manichean light, in which alternative ideological perspectives are mistrusted. American liberal democracy and Zionism thus provide the perfect counter-ideologies on which Arab nationalism can thrive. And hence Arab nationalists, at the grassroots level or at the state level, have often found themselves in conflict with fellow Arabs of opposing ideologies (be they conservative regimes or Islamists at home).
4. The internal pluralism within ideologies in general is also manifested in Arab nationalism. Thus, we can see differences among the intellectuals in the movement, the general public, and the militaries that adopt Arab nationalism. There were different strategies between the revolutionary and more "radical" Arab nationalists of the 1966 Ba'athist government, who believed in an offensive approach to achieve its goals, and the "pragmatists" after Hafez Asad's rise to power, who adopted a more defensive approach. Some strands of Arab nationalism prioritize Arab unity, some associate closely with socialism, whereas others will prioritize protection of Arab independence.
5. Arab nationalism, like any other ideology, neither emerged nor exists within a vacuum. Particularly in Syria's case, Arab nationalism was strongly shaped and guided by the political and social context at the time. Mistrust of external forces thus continues to be a defining feature of the ideology. Arab unity, on the other hand, has been harder to adhere to, in part because other Arab states have shown little interest in this principle. Another example of the ideology's flexibility is the treatment of Turkey—initially mistrusted as a former imperial pro-western power, it was embraced by Arab nationalists when it demonstrated that it shared some of their ideological goals between 2008 and 2011.
6. Arab nationalism is a political phenomenon in that it views culture, the economy, and religion through an ideological and political light.

Culture, including Arabism, is co-opted for the political struggle; economic matters have similarly been subject to political agendas—thus, during the 1960s, a socialist economy was seen as a way of advancing the political goals of the ideology. Religion is not dismissed entirely as is the case in communism—it is instrumentalized as a part of Arab identity, but is not to override the loyalty to a secular Arab nationalism.

7. And finally, Arab nationalism gained momentum as a popular political movement in response to the turmoil after the First World War. The pervasive impact of French colonialism in Syria and the accessibility of Arab nationalism's anti-imperialist message gave it greater traction among a wide audience. The leaders have been a product of the societal adherence to ideology. That connection was far stronger before the institutionalization of ideology under the Ba'ath, but public opinion has remained as a significant justification for the continued pursuit of Arab nationalist goals in Syrian foreign policy.

Contingency of Ideologies and Application to Foreign Policy

Points 4 and 5 of the above typology, concerning the adaptable and contingent nature of ideologies, warrant further explanation, for, as Halliday and Alavi note, “[i]deologies are not *infinitely* flexible,”³⁰ and adaptation occurs in a structured way, often in keeping with an internal logic of the movement. Moreover, the process of ideological construction and implementation is not purely endogenous—external factors play an important role in shaping an ideology's goals and principles from the outset, and in producing a relevant context in which it can operate. Such factors also affect the implementation and salience of the ideology. To give an example, if an actor's *allies* are using rhetoric or pursuing policies that are ideological, there will be an added commitment for the said actor to support them (notably, the policies of Hizbullah or Iran will have an impact on Syria's ideological adherence). Similarly, if an *enemy* is overtly ideological in its motives and policies (such as Israel), this acts as greater provocation for an ideological response. It is also very likely that the implementation of ideological policies will, in turn, feed back to the external factors to make them more ideologically charged. This would then perpetuate the salience of ideology in a given situation. The relationship between the various influential factors (be they internal or external to the actor) and the continued salience, or indeed demise of ideological policies, are demonstrated below in figure 1.1.

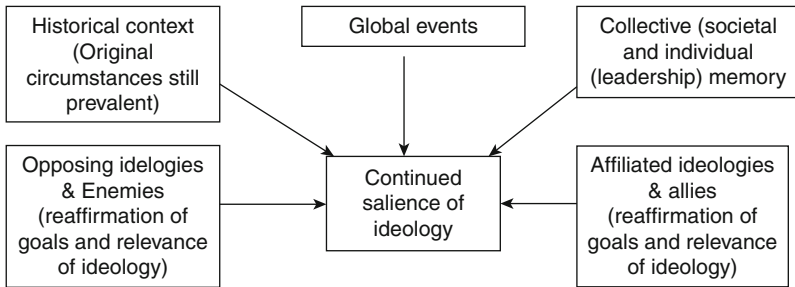


Figure 1.1 The contingency of ideological salience over time

Identifying the factors that influence ideological implementation gives us a clearer idea of: when ideology is being implemented because it is contextually relevant, when it is not implemented because there is a lack of contextual relevance, and finally when it appears to have been discarded despite contextual relevance.

If the above framework is applied, it would have a significant impact on the reading of Arab nationalism in the Syrian context—its meaning, its manifestation, and implementation in domestic or foreign policy would be understood as a real but *contingent* phenomenon. If functioning ideologies are read as being inherently contingent, it makes it harder to make absolutist, “all or nothing” observations of ideology and the role it plays in decision-making. Instead, there should be a more robust criterion for measuring whether, or the extent to which, an ideology has been discarded or compromised.

How we measure the importance of any factor and its role in causation is a concern for the social sciences in general, which often cannot rely on the quantitative and “objective” methods of the natural sciences. J. S. Mill sought to confront this problem with the use of inductive questions to filter out factors of greater and lesser significance in a social or political phenomenon.³¹ Such an approach would not “prove” anything as the sole causal factor behind US-Syrian policy-making—nor is that the intention here—but it can be used to highlight the significance of ideology as one factor among several that cannot be overlooked.

According to this method, if a variable (in this case ideological motives) was not particularly significant, it would capitulate when placed under pressure. Thus, we would need to analyze whether ideology is a continuous variable even under situations of pressure. In Syria’s case, the historical resilience of ideology in its foreign policy, even when the surrounding conditions suggest that a discarding of ideology would have better served its self-interests, would act as a strong indicator that ideological factors are

at play. In view of this method, the following questions will be implicitly integrated throughout this study and returned to more directly in the concluding chapter:

1. At times when the Syrian regime was under pressure from the United States to comply (under sanctions and the threat of force), how did it react?
2. When Syria lost the support of its allies because it still held to ideological principles, while they did not, how did it react?
3. When Syria was offered significant concessions to discard its ideological position, particularly through material and financial incentives, how did it react?
4. When Syria faced a possible failure of its goals, what impact did this have on its ideological policies?

This set of questions is by no means exhaustive, nor exclusionary of non-ideological factors; moreover, it would only provide a reliable picture of Syria's foreign policy and its connections with ideology when used to analyze Syria's policies over a long period of time. However, it does provide us with an effective measurement of the limits to material and power-political explanations. Comparison will be used to bolster this method in two different ways: first, a comparison between Syria's reactions and the reactions of neighboring states that did discard their ideological goals; second, a comparison of Syria's reactions across different historical periods, in order to understand the circumstances that produce continuities or indeed discontinuities in Syria's foreign policy and the salience of ideology.

Outline of the Book

The four parts of the book reflect the combined theoretical and historical approach adopted in this study, allowing us to identify distinct patterns in US-Syrian relations *across* time. Part I identifies the long-term historical roots of US-Syrian ambivalence after Syrian independence, focusing on the United States' shift from a champion of Arab rights to the foremost supporter of Israel. It assesses the impact of the Cold War on the US relations and image among Arab states; it also addresses Syria's domestic politics and the relationship between ideology and society.

Part II takes up the historical narrative just before the outbreak of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Chapter 3 analyzes the centrality of the Arab-Israeli dispute in antagonizing relations between Syria and the United States; Chapter 4 looks at the rise of Hafez Asad in the Ba'ath and the evolution

of the party, from its intellectual roots to its domination by the military, and how that affected Syrian foreign policy in the long term.

Part III is a critical section in which Syria and the United States finally engage in direct negotiations after the 1973 war. It focuses on the disengagement talks between Israel and the Arab parties, and draws an important comparison between Egypt and Syria, which experienced very differing outcomes from US mediation—this is used to empirically highlight the impact of ideological considerations, when they are taken into account and when they are discarded. It explains why Syria did not pursue the same course as Egypt, and the lack of impartiality in US tactics.

Finally, Part IV continues with the theme of engagement and analyzes a period of direct communication between Syria, Israel, and the United States during the Madrid process from 1991 to 1996. Chapter 7 examines whether Syria's cooperation demonstrated a departure from, or consistency with, its Arab nationalist principles and strategic calculations for the region. It brings home the nuances of the overall argument in the book, demonstrating that (a) the operationalization of ideology in foreign policy need not be dogmatic, nor as straightforward as might be presumed on the surface; and (b) pragmatism can be found even within an "ideological" foreign policy, making it clear that ideology alone cannot be taken to explain *every* facet of state behavior. Both Chapters 7 and 8 reassess the assumption that Syria has essentially played the role of a "spoiler" in the Middle East peace process and that its actions have primarily instigated poor relations with the United States.

A final word regarding the selection of case studies and cutoff point of the book is in order here. The chapters reflect major historical junctures from the Syrian perspective, rather than the more well-known and utilized Cold War framework, which reflects historical junctures from an American and western perspective. Without doubt the Cold War, and the changes that it brought about in US foreign policy have had a very important influence on US-Syrian relations, and for some Middle East states have shaped their entire foreign policy; however, this book aims to highlight the alternative worldviews and national priorities that existed alongside the dominant agendas of the superpowers. Some events in history—such as the establishment of Israel in 1948 (roughly coinciding with the start of the Cold War), the Arab defeats of 1967, and Egypt's truce with Israel—sent far greater shock waves through the Middle East than obvious Cold War watersheds, and are viewed there as turning points independent of the Cold War. And while those events became embroiled with the Cold War at the time, their implications have outlived US-Soviet rivalry and do not neatly conform to global historical turning points. That the United States and Syria do not necessarily share the same historical narratives or reference points has

contributed to their poor relations and understanding—in this way, the chosen historical framework of the book will help to shed light on how diverging historical narratives help shape foreign policy priorities.

The focus on different chronological periods is important to provide a comprehensive overview of US-Syrian relations across time, to highlight the changing contexts in which their interaction takes place, and to demonstrate the longevity of their mutual mistrust despite global and regional changes.

There are arguably four arenas of Syrian-American contention: the Arab-Israeli conflict, Lebanon, Iraq, and most recently the conflict within Syria itself. This book notably focuses on the first and omits the latter three. The Arab-Israeli arena is just one, but also the most important and formative site of US-Syrian hostility, affecting their relations over other issues. Many of the conclusions drawn from the Arab-Israeli arena can similarly be applied to other cases of Syrian-American interaction. At a more functional level, there will always be more to discuss in any book, and similarly there will always be constraints on space—this book is no different. The lack of discussion on the other three arenas is acknowledged therefore as a shortcoming, but alas an unavoidable one.

The study ends with the last days of Hafez Asad's presidency, a natural juncture in Syria's ideological policy. That is not to say that ideology ceased to play a role under the successor regime: notably, the fallout over Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 marked another phase in Syrian-American relations that was in fact testament to the enduring role of ideology in their foreign policies toward each other.

Notes

1. See: United States Congressional Report 2008; "U.S.-Syria: Who's Converting Whom?," *Middle East Strategy at Harvard*, April 25, 2008: http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/04/us_syria_whos_converting_whom/; "Iraq a Catalyst for US-Syria Rapprochement?," *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 4, 2010: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=iraq-a-catalyst-for-us-syria-rapprochement-2010-04-04>; "Inside Story," *Al-Jazeera English*, February 22, 2009: <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/insidestory/2009/02/200922214452166695.html>; "US-Syria Relations Still Mired in Mistrust," *BBC News*, March 18, 2009: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7949480.stm>; "Engaging Syria? U.S. Constraints and Opportunities," International Crisis Group Report on US-Syrian Relations, February 2009: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-syria-lebanon/syria/083-engaging-syria-us-constraints-and-opportunities.aspx>; Mary Crane, Council on Foreign Relations report: *Middle East: U.S.-Syrian Relations*, February 18, 2005: <http://www.cfr.org/middle-east/middle-east-us-syrian-relations/p7852>.

2. When using the term hostility here, it is not to be understood as armed conflict—in part the possibility of regular military warfare is negated by the asymmetries of military power between the two states. However, both Syria and the United States can be described as having been engaged in an enduring conflict of interests, policies, tactics, goals, and ideas. I argue that their diplomatic and political clashes, frequently exacerbated by the withdrawal of ambassadorial representation on both sides, can be categorized as a form of hostility when one understands that peace, or peaceful relations, denotes more than just the absence of interstate military combat. The latter is an archetypal realist conceptualization of peace that places analytical emphasis on military engagement. However, a broader and more complex understanding of both conflict and peace facilitates a reading of US-Syrian relations as hostile, antagonistic, and certainly not peaceful. See: Johan Galtung's seminal work "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3) (1969), pp. 167–191, which argues that structural violence can still prevail even in the absence of war; and Kristine Höglund and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, "Beyond the Absence of War: The Diversity of Peace in Post-Settlement Societies," *Review of International Studies*, 36 (2010), pp. 367–390. The literature relates to internal state politics, but the concept can be extended to the nature of interstate relations.
3. Only five books on US-Syrian relations have been published in English to date. The best and most rigorous of these is David Lesch's *Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East* (1992); it is an excellent historical account drawing upon key primary documents, but it takes us no further than 1957, when US-Syrian relations were just beginning to take shape.
4. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiraven Ehteshami, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System* (Routledge, 1997), p. 23.
5. Stephen Hobden, *International Relations and Historical Sociology: Breaking Down Boundaries* (Routledge, 1998), p. 24.
6. Ibid.
7. Orientalist literature built on the work of a number of influential scholars who used the Middle East as a comparative model for other subjects of their work, such as Ernest Renan, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, as well as the diaries and reports of high-ranking government figures who had been based in the region, such as Britain's Lord Cromer. By the 1960s, the works of orientalist scholars such as H. A. R. Gibb, Harold Bowen, and, later, Bernard Lewis were particularly prominent. For examples of Lewis' work and the deterministic approach outlined above, see: *The Middle East and the West* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963); and, more recently, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002). "Modernizationists" were an offshoot of the orientalist tradition, the most well known being Samuel Huntington, author of the "Clash of Civilizations" thesis. It is worth noting that Middle East studies did not exist per se—in the academy, scholarship on the region was largely the domain of philologists, while jurists and economists were relied upon for expertise outside of academia. The

reliance on linguists meant that a knowledge of and access to ancient texts was often passed as qualification to comment on contemporary issues in the region. Zachary Lockman argues that these foundations meant scholars were not focusing on the more universally common features of the region, and moreover were inclined to view it through the temporally narrow lens of the ancient and medieval texts they were familiar with. For an excellent overview of the development of orientalism and Middle East studies, see: Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East; the History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); and for a reassessment of orientalist histories, see: Israel Gershoni, Amy Singer, and Y. Hakan Erdem (Eds.), *Middle East Historiographies: Narrating the Twentieth Century* (University of Washington Press, 2006).

8. Among the early scholars breaking the mold were Anouar Abdel-Malek, Maxime Rodinson, and Albert Hourani. Later challengers to the exceptionalist viewpoint include Gunder Frank, Roger Owen (focusing particularly on the importance of political economy in the region), and Fred Halliday.
9. EH Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Macmillan Press, 1946).
10. Adeed Dawisha, Bassam Tibi, Fouad Ajami, and Youssef Chaitani are among the foremost proponents of this influential view.
11. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (5th edition, Knopf, 1978); for the application of the theory to a case study, see: Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Little, Brown, 1971).
12. Fouad Ajami, "The End of Pan Arabism," *Foreign Affairs*, (1978–1979), pp. 355–373.; Jubin Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran: Diplomatic Alliance and Power Politics in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 12.
13. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Addison-Wesley, 1979).
14. Namely: Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the Egyptian-Israeli truce; Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and the Iranian Revolution. For the significance of these events in shaping the modern Middle East, from a neorealist angle, see: David Lesch, 1979: *The Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East* (Westview Press, 2001).
15. Shibley Telhami and Michael N. Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 3–4.
16. For example, see Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Cornell University Press, 1987); Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 217; Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 19–21.
17. For example, Peter Sluglett, "The Cold War in the Middle East," in Fawcett (Ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 40–57.
18. Ajami, "The End of Pan Arabism.," Adeed Dawisha, "Requiem for Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Quarterly*, 10 (1) (2003), pp. 25–41.

19. Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran*, p. 12; Humphreys, Stephen, "The Strange Career of Pan-Arabism," in *Between Memory and Desire. The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (University of California Press, 2005), pp. 73–74.
20. Rick Fawn and Raymond Hinnebusch, *Iraq War: Causes and Consequences*, (Lynne Rienner, 2006) p. 129; Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran*, 13; Robert Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (Praeger Security International, 2006), p. xxi.
21. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *Syria and Iran*, 162; Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'ath v. Ba'ath: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968–1989* (I.B. Tauris, 1990), p. 136; Efraim Karsh, *The Soviet Union and Syria: The Asad Years* (Chatham House, 1988), 3.
22. Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Routledge, 2004), p. 64.
23. Alan George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (Zed, 2003), 9–14; Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 157–158.
24. Fred Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 12.
25. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *Syria and Iran*; and see also: *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, pp. 141–163.
26. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *Syria and Iran*, p. 24.
27. As explained in Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 99; and see also: Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (Routledge, 1991), p. 49.
28. Interviews by author with the following: Syrian mission to the UN, Dr. Bashar Ja'afari (New York, February 17, 2009); Syrian ambassador to the United States, Dr. Imad Moustapha (Washington, DC, June 2009); Syrian ambassador to the UK, Dr. Sami Khiyami (London, May 2007); former head of the Arab League, Ghayth Armanazi (London, June 2007); academic Dr. Murhaf Jouejati (Washington, DC, June 2009).
29. Fred Halliday and Hamza Alavi (Eds.), *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*, (Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), pp. 5–6.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 7, emphasis in original.
31. J. S. Mill edited by J. M. Robson, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation* (Routledge, 1973).

Part I

The Emergence of US-Syrian Relations: From Truman to Kennedy

Part I analyzes the long-term roots and evolution of Syrian and American policies, elucidating the regional and postcolonial context in which their bilateral relations developed. It analyzes policies and events, but also deliberately explores the perceptions of the two sides. US-Syrian antipathy did not emerge from a negative reaction to a single policy—their positions were molded by perceptions and evaluations that had developed over time, incrementally, from a series of encounters and strategies from both sides in the region.

The following questions are addressed in the chapters in this part: What were the determinants of Syria's early foreign policy, and what were its aims? Similarly, what were the aims and strategy of the United States in the Middle East? What policies did it adopt in relation to Syria in particular? The chapters analyze how their respective aims affected their policies toward each other; they explore the historical factors that heightened the possibility of mutual hostility, as well as the immediate policies and actions that confirmed it. Possible avenues for conciliation are also addressed, as well as the reasons they ultimately failed.

The chapters also highlight the distinctive aspects of Washington's policy toward Syria in comparison to other states in the region, and any changes that emerged; hence, they follow US-Syrian relations from the interwar period, and then through the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations. And finally the chapter will investigate the nascent roots of ideology in Syrian foreign policy during its immediate postcolonial history. Overall, the chapter underscores the longevity of US-Syrian mistrust and demonstrates that latter US-Syrian relations cannot be understood without reference to the region's history in the early twentieth century.

It is notable that both states in this period viewed the region as a connected whole—Syria from the perspective of Arab nationalism and the United States from the perspective of a global Cold War. Neither shared former colonial links, nor current economic ties; without direct bilateral relations to draw upon, a comprehensive approach to Arab opinion that incorporates the Syrian perspective is at times necessary for this early historical analysis.

The Rise of the United States and the Roots of Syrian Mistrust

The Early Syrian State and American Isolationism

The European mandates after the First World War laid the foundations for Syrian politics in the interwar period, thereby producing a legacy of priorities, fears, and aspirations that was built upon by later Arab political actors. It is often easy to neglect the US contribution to these foundations as it played a relatively limited role, but this in itself had a bearing on the policies and perceptions of various regional players.

At the end of the First World War, in line with the general principle of self-determination, President Woodrow Wilson indicated that the United States was sympathetic toward Arab aspirations, stating as the 12th of his “Fourteen Points” that

The other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.¹

However, while this apparently demonstrated strong American support for Arab sovereignty, the United States made no attempt to thwart the major powers’ quest for control over the Middle East; rather, the mandate system enshrined in the US-inspired Covenant of the League of Nations acted as a green light. The United States held a typically isolationist stance toward the Middle East and saw temporary European control over the region to be in the best interests of all parties involved.

A brief hiatus to its isolationism occurred in May 1919, when the United States sent two prominent businessmen, Henry King and Charles

Crane, on a fact-finding mission to Syria (then still incorporating Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon) and Iraq. By sending an academic and a businessman rather than politicians to carry out a report with no binding effect, the United States was signaling its continued *political* indifference to the region so as to allay both European fears and Arab expectations, without appearing wholly detached from world affairs. Ultimately, their report, outlining a unified Arab state and independence as the overwhelming wish of the people, was virtually ignored and made no contribution to British and French plans for the region; it was subsequently determined that "Syria should go to France and Mesopotamia to Great Britain."

Though the United States distanced itself from colonial projects, it did not object to the French mandate over Syria in a meeting of the Council of Four just a few days before all mandates were authorized and fixed, despite the fact that of all the great powers, France and its history of colonial rule was the most resented by the Arabs.² As King and Crane candidly concluded in their report, the Syrian mandate would go to France, "frankly based, not on the primary desires of the people, but on the international need of preserving friendly relations between France and Great Britain."³

Besides the ultimately ineffective King-Crane initiative, US interest in the Middle East during the interwar period did not extend further than commercial investment in the region's relatively untapped oil assets.⁴ The Syrians, in turn, had little interest in the activities of the United States. Syria had three major concerns at this time: maintaining continued resistance to the great powers in the Middle East; opposing a growing Zionist movement, particularly since the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and increased Jewish immigration into Palestine; and resolving the internal factional strife that allowed the French to exploit their differences. In response to these concerns, Arab nationalist sentiment reached even greater levels during the 1930s, exacerbated by the Palestinian uprising in 1936 and the enactment of yet more treaties to prolong informal mandates in the Arab states.⁵ In Syria, this unrest was notably manifested at a popular level.⁶

By the 1940s, this popular movement was being channeled into political organizations, first through the formation of Arab nationalist parties—the foremost of which was the Ba'ṯh—and second via the Arab League. The Ba'ṯh party, meaning "resurrection" in Arabic, was formally established in 1944 by two Syrian intellectuals, Salah al-Din Bitar, a Sunni Muslim, and Michel Aflaq, a Christian. For them, Arab nationalism symbolized first and foremost a struggle against colonizers. As Bitar and Aflaq reflected of the movement at the time:

[W]e saw nationalism simply as a struggle between the nation and the colonizer . . . In the country those who helped the foreigner were called traitors and those who opposed them nationalists.⁷

The Ba'ath claimed to present a comprehensive political program with its three fundamental principles being "Freedom from occupation; Arab independence and unity; socialism at home"; alongside other groups, it focused on increasing its support base and challenging any signs of pro-westernism in the government in the postwar years.⁸ Meanwhile, the Arab League pact targeted Arab unity, and was formally signed by Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia on March 22, 1945. It prohibited any resort to force among member states, provided for the consultation and mutual assistance in the event of aggression against a member state, set up a council and a secretary-general with headquarters in Cairo, and provided for cooperation between member states in other nonpolitical fields.

However, such was the lack of US political involvement in the region at the time that, in the words of the US Director of Office of the Near East, "relations with the Arabs remained in general unaffected by these developments."⁹ Only when pressed by the Saudis for a view on Arab unity, Washington stated in general terms:

The policy of the United States Government toward the Near Eastern nations has not formally been stated, but its general attitude is well known. This Government desires to see the independent countries of the Near East retain their freedom and strengthen their economic and social condition, and fully sympathises with the aspirations of other Near Eastern countries for complete liberty . . .¹⁰

Outwardly, then, the United States adopted an early policy of sympathy and support for Arab unity, independence, and greater prominence in world affairs.

In accordance with this policy, the United States recognized Syria's struggle for independence against the French and that it would need financial assistance to overcome disorder and French obstructionism as the Syrians came closer to their goal. Anticipating conflict, Syrian leaders appealed to the United States to provide policing equipment and training to enable them to maintain internal order. The US ministers based in the Middle East with their knowledge of the situation were keen to meet such requests. Thus, in early August 1945, Merriam, head of the US Near East Department, proposed "in the interest of peace and security" the allocation of up to \$100,000,000 a year for several years, administered jointly by

the State, War, and Navy Departments, until the region became politically and strategically stabilized¹¹—the plan, however, was rejected by Secretary of State George Marshall as unfeasible.¹²

Unable to provide Arab states like Syria with the necessary financial backing for long-term stabilization, a frustrated Merriam acknowledged that “our policies in these situations are not worth the paper they are written on because we have not prompt and effective means of carrying them out.” The notion of empty promises and lack of real help when needed was to be a recurring theme in Arab nationalist rhetoric against the United States in later years, ironically based on the same assessment Merriam had made of his own government.

Since the United States could not or was not willing to provide any concrete support via finances or military help, it was left to the British to intervene with its forces when clashes between the Syrians and the French reached serious levels and threatened to destabilize neighboring states. Nevertheless, the records show significant US concern over France’s inflammatory policy, prompting strong condemnation and unequivocal instructions to the French that they should evacuate Syria without conditions.¹³ Through these collective efforts, the UN in April 1946 finally terminated the French mandate, demanded their immediate withdrawal, and declared Syria an independent state. Shukri Al-Quwatli, the head of the Syrian National Party, and the incumbent president under the French mandate since 1943, stayed on in the role as Syria entered independence. Thus, it is fair to say that, ultimately, the United States played a late but important role in aiding Syrian independence; indeed, it is arguable that this constitutes the single most significant act of US assistance toward the Syrians throughout their modern relations.

Notwithstanding this positive intervention for Syrian independence, it should be noted that ending Europe’s monopoly over the Middle East’s resources was a key motive in the US policy to support Arab independence. US interests remained focused on the region’s economic potential, despite the major political developments taking place in this period. Hence, even during the high point of nationalist unrest during the Second World War, American correspondence and documentation on all regional affairs were dominated by the issue of access to Saudi and Iraqi petroleum.¹⁴

Thus, the United States’ major interaction with the Syrians in this formative era was to support their independence and to engage in active diplomacy to oust the French. It represented a positive beginning from which Syria and the United States, on the face of it, had the opportunity to form more substantive and durable bilateral relations. However, it is also clear that US policy in the Middle East was focused on forging relations with oil-rich and economically strategic countries; the United States largely

remained passive to the region's major political developments, not yet perceiving the implications they would have for its own global and ideological strategy after the Second World War. This demonstrates how crucial the next period would be in molding the direction of future US-Arab relations.

Increased American Involvement and Arab Disappointment

As the physical presence and political influence of France and Britain began to recede in the Middle East, the role and participation of the United States in the region as a western, yet historically neutral, force became more significant and came under greater scrutiny. The significance of its role lay in its coinciding rise as a superpower, and through that its increased potential to act as a fair arbiter in the region's affairs, with the political leverage and military might needed to defend state sovereignty and individual rights. At first, there had been ample hope among Syria's Arab nationalist movements based on the United States' minimal and relatively unsullied record of involvement in the region, as well as its public chastisement of European colonialism as an obstacle to democracy and freedom.¹⁵ The Atlantic Charter, extolling the need for democracy and independence in all parts of the world, signed by US President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1941, had given further cause for optimism in the Arab world.¹⁶

Arab political actors did not immediately shun the United States through a simple anti-western prejudice; rather, they observed and judged the United States on its policies and reactions to regional issues, hoping to see a departure from the old Anglo-French approach.¹⁷ In a conference between US ministers to the Middle East and Harry Truman shortly after he became president in 1945 after the death of Roosevelt, US Minister to Syria and Lebanon George Wadsworth spoke of the Arab world and its importance to the United States. He warned that the United States needed to form a positive postwar policy prioritizing Arab independence and unity as a primary objective, and not to merely view the region in an instrumentalist light. He argued:

[I]t seems vital to recognize that the whole Arab world is in ferment, that its peoples are on the threshold of a new renaissance, that each one of them wants forthrightly to run its own show, as the countries of the Western Hemisphere run theirs, without imperialistic interference, be it British or French, in their internal affairs. They say: "You have your Pan-American Union; we want our Arab Unity. Relations between your countries are based on respect for the principles of sovereign equality; that is the principle upon which we wish to base our relations with each other and with all other

nations. We need foreign skills and capital and technical experts but not foreign dictation. We want treaties of friendship with all countries, treaties of alliance and special privilege with none. In our dealings with foreign governments and interests, we want to be free to apply freely the principle of equality of opportunity and the open door" . . . the United States can play a leading role. Our moral leadership is recognized today. The governments to which we are accredited want most of all to know whether we are going to implement that leadership, whether we are going to follow through after our great victory or leave the field, as we did at the end of the war, to others.¹⁸

His summary of Arab sentiment toward the United States, based on his knowledge of the Arab nationalist movement in Syria, demonstrates how critical this immediate postwar period was for the future trajectory of the West's relations with the Middle East. Wadsworth predicted that if the United States failed to give the right support, the Arab states would turn to the Soviet Union and would "be lost to our civilization." And even so, he specifically pointed out that there need not be conflict with the Soviet Union in the region as their policies had thus far simply paralleled that of the United States in acknowledging the independence of Arab states. Due to their existing close relations, the future alignment of Saudi Arabia and Egypt with the United States was less in doubt than that of the Syrians, who had already begun to develop ties with the Soviet Union since its prompt recognition of Syrian independence. However, despite such fears, Syria's President Quwatli made clear in these initial stages that Syria, having no other formal relations with any other country since independence, wished to have its closest ties with the United States, to sign its first treaty with the United States, and to use it as a model for such relations with other states.¹⁹ With this positive approach and willingness to cooperate, and with sound intelligence readily offered by US legations on the ground, why then did relations between Syria and the United States take such a negative turn?

One might simply point to actual US policies that turned Arab nationalist governments such as Syria's against them. However, most of these policies only became apparent during the mid-1950s when Britain's prolonged withdrawal from the Middle East was emphatically confirmed, and the United States felt it both had a freer hand in the region and needed to do more to prevent Soviet encroachment.²⁰ By that period, doubt and suspicion of US interest in the region was already shifting to outright rejection, at both government and popular levels; indeed, suspicion of the United States had been accumulating from a much earlier stage. Having had the opportunity to observe US motivations and its approach to the region, four areas of dissatisfaction began to emerge among the Arabs.

The Cold War Comes First: US Instrumentalization of the Middle East

First, while the United States sought to maintain its image as a bastion of freedom and self-determination cultivated after the First World War, many nationalists, both politicians and activists alike, began to see a different picture in which the Americans were certainly different, but not necessarily better, than their predecessors.²¹ The French and the British had sought direct control over the region, but not only for access to resources—a sense of historical ownership and an attempt to hold on to their fading imperial identities also played a part, particularly with regard to the French in Syria, which had little to offer by way of resources; the Arabs, in turn, were able to position themselves in direct opposition to the European powers, fighting against imperialism and accountability to outsiders. Thus, it was a clearly drawn existential conflict, fought over territory and resources, but rooted in issues of ideology and identity. The French and the British had multiple concerns in different parts of the world, but the nature of Empire meant that those commitments necessitated a high degree of local knowledge and interest; though unpopular, there was no doubt about their direct and visible engagement with the region.

The new situation was subtly different. While Roosevelt had claimed to be morally committed to the rights and independence of all states and regions for the sake of democracy, the arrival of Truman's administration saw the United States move away from the rhetoric of idealism, announcing a more confrontational foreign policy via the Truman Doctrine. It specifically focused on its rivalry with the USSR as its main concern. In this context, there was little time for bilateral dealings with Syria; it was subsumed under a wider global strategy. It was no longer the case that there were a multitude of disparate issues, which all had to be resolved individually by the colonial power involved. Now, an issue, a conflict, or a country was only significant in that it had strategic implications for a single, all-encompassing priority, that being the emerging bipolar Cold War.

The Middle East—and especially Syria, with little historical connections with the United States or Britain, and lacking in oil—was to witness this hierarchy of concerns firsthand; this generated the first aspect of Arab disappointment.²² The United States calculated that a stable and continuous energy supply would be central in reconstructing Europe and Japan in any power struggle with the Soviet Union, and that control over those supplies would be a crucial battleground—it was *this* that prompted the United States to take a far greater political interest in the region.²³ If we look forward to almost a decade after Syrian independence and the creation of Israel, US Secretary of State John Dulles acknowledged the difference in priorities between the Arabs and the Americans, stating that the Arabs

are “more fearful of Zionism than of Communism, and they fear lest the United States become the backer of expansionist Zionism”; moreover, their differences with Britain, France, and Israel meant the Arabs paid “little heed to the menace of Soviet Communism.”²⁴ This recognition, however, was to come later: under Truman, US policy toward the Middle East was dominated by its preoccupation with the Soviet Union and little else.

Different Rules for Different Regions

The second issue of contention was the United States’ disparate treatment of its western allies and so-called Middle Eastern allies. According to the National Security Council (NSC) paper 129/1 titled “US Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Arab State and Israel,” the United States’ goals were (1) to reduce the instability threatening the West’s interests, (2) to counter and diminish Soviet influence (and in turn to increase the West’s influence), (3) to maintain accessibility of resources (chiefly oil) for the United States and its allies in order to strengthen the “free world,” (4) to help these countries resist Soviet “aggression,” and (5) to strengthen the notion of sovereignty in the Middle East.²⁵ It is clear from this where US priorities lay.

The United States perceived the above aims would be achieved through a minimum objective of stability (and later on, through the maximum objective of Arab-Israeli peace).²⁶ With the latter seeming such a distant prospect in the postwar period, and even more so after 1948, the only viable option apparently left for the United States was the basic retention of stability. As in the traditional interpretation of the international system, stability for the United States meant retaining the status quo, and hence blocking the progress of “leftist” movements that opposed the West and acted as channels for Soviet influence.

While it could be argued that the United States adopted the same approach to all the regions it was involved with, including Europe, it should be noted that the Middle East states were not beneficiaries of the United States’ altruistic ideological agenda in the same way that Europe was.²⁷ Not *any* state’s sovereignty was necessarily worth protecting, nor were the Middle East’s resources to be safeguarded for its own uses; rather, US concerns for democracy were reserved chiefly for allies outside the Middle East that were deemed to be ideologically sound. By comparison, Europe did not have the same material value (by way of resources) as the Middle East; that the United States was so keen to prevent Soviet-communist encroachment in the region testifies to the strength of Washington’s ideological commitment to its allies in the West. In contrast, the Middle East was deemed valuable for its strategic and material value, with little potential

for ideological co-option.²⁸ What happened there domestically was of little concern to the United States, except when it was feared that a state's internal politics might provide a gateway for Soviet penetration, and thereby enemy access to vital strategic resources.

The question that Middle Eastern states were asking was: What would *they* be gaining by cooperating with the United States? For those seeking a change from the mandatory status quo, there was something fundamentally contradictory about Washington's Middle East policy. Certainly, it was strongly ideological; but, surely, notions of the "free world" referred not just to freedom at the interstate level, but also domestically, to those individual liberties that constituted so-called democracies. And yet, as it appeared to actors in the Middle East—politicians, social movements, the public—this element was so crudely dispensed with in the US approach to the region that it seemed an ideological ally in this part of the world was one that merely facilitated US intervention on American terms.

With such a dim view of Arab aspirations, it is not surprising that the United States did not exert more effort in sustaining a unified political regeneration of the region. Nor is it surprising, given the above, that it was difficult for the United States to co-opt Middle Eastern states to its own liberal democratic program. Ultimately, having failed to make a lasting impression in this way, the United States resorted to a limited, short-termist approach in which it offered material incentives to remove obstacles to western interests in the region. Thus, any relationships between the United States and Arab states were strategic and relatively superficial beyond economic assistance.

Conflicting Ideologies

What impact did offering financial rewards alone, based on an American ideological agenda, have on state behavior? If there was no inherent reason to align with the United States except for material gain, and less immediately to avoid conflict with a superpower, when such aid and pecuniary incentives dried up, so too did the channels of cooperation. This, in fact, raised the potential for instability in the regional system, and ironically it also locked the United States into greater participation in an effort to control this outcome.

The adoption of alternative ideological agendas by Middle Eastern states represented attempts, however unsuccessful, to counter such instability, in order to foster some regional cohesion based on principles rather than on inconsistent and transitory advantages such as external grants. Thus, two forces of directly opposing visions for stability in the region

emerged: neutralist (or what the United States saw as “leftist”) movements seeking internal agency, and the West, seeking to harness the region for the global struggle against communism. The US and neutralist movements diverged in priorities, interpretation of problems, and prescribed solutions for the prevailing instability in the region. It was all the more galling for Arab nationalists that the United States had previously voiced their support and enthusiasm for greater Arab unity and independence,²⁹ whereas now American leaders were singling them out as a threat.

What is clear is that accumulative perceptions mattered; it is inaccurate to define Middle Eastern opposition in this period as an instantaneous backlash to the United States’ growing support for Israel (more of which in the next subsection), or *purely* resistance to any form of interference in the region, as it can often appear when existing literature focuses on a particular event, rather than relations over time;³⁰ moreover, this incremental opposition resulted from a holistic *evaluation* of US interests and approaches to the Middle East, and an assessment of the repercussions of US intervention. To view Arab opposition in just a reactionary light attaches suggestions of irrationality and emotiveness to the governments and the societies in the region in a way that belies the more considered and conscious positions of the Arab states in this period.

US Support for Israel

The above policies of the United States that clashed with Arab interests and aspirations were all rooted in America’s security interests and ideological battle with the USSR. However, there was one other key area of contention between the United States and Arab states, which was not yet a part of the Cold War framework: Washington’s support for the establishment of an Israeli state. Wilson’s principles of national self-determination and the importance of popular will, and the Atlantic Charter that followed, gave the Arabs cause for optimism that the new hegemon would help them to achieve their aspirations, which had been blocked for so many years by the European powers. The early American condemnation of imperialism and the European mandates had resonated deeply with the Arabs—they thus expected the United States would similarly support their view that the 1917 Balfour Declaration, and its promise to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was an extension of European colonialism and secret diplomacy, and therefore neither legitimate nor justified.

They were of course proved wrong—for not only did the United States endorse Britain’s agreement with the World Zionist Organization, but it went further than Britain by supporting the formation of a new state

altogether, and the unlimited immigration of Jewish people into Palestine. Under the mandate, Britain had attempted to manage a worsening situation between Palestinians and Jewish immigrants by limiting the number of immigrants to 30,000; moreover, they had sought to prevent the displacement of the Palestinian population because of the problems it would cause in neighboring British mandates. In contrast, the practicalities and consequences of Jewish immigration for the existing communities in Palestine did not come into American consideration. On February 1, 1944, the US Congress passed a motion stating:

The doors of Palestine shall be opened for free entry of Jews into the country, and there shall be full opportunity for colonization so that the Jewish people may ultimately reconstitute Palestine as a free and democratic Jewish Commonwealth.³¹

This, then, was not a new policy to emerge after the onset of the Cold War, but had been gaining momentum over the interwar period. Thus, in the same period when he was championing Arab rights in the Atlantic Charter, Roosevelt was passionately advocating the need for a Jewish state in the region. This was in part attributable to his own Jewish ancestry and a personal emotional affinity that he felt with the Jews. But he was not alone among America's political elite. Many of them felt deep sympathy for the plight of Jews since the Holocaust and sought to make amends on behalf of the West. Moreover, domestic political dynamics were at play even in the early years of US engagement with the Middle East, and a large Jewish-American community and general public opinion in favour of an Israeli state meant Arab aspirations on this issue were sidelined. While the Arab-American differences outlined previously emerged with the start of the Cold War, the source of this friction was independent of, and preceded, the Cold War.

However, with Israel's unilateral declaration of statehood in 1947, followed by UN ratification and the formal separation of Palestine in 1948, Washington's pro-Israel policy became more prominent in the Middle East. It happened to coincide with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine—thus both of these aspects of US policy in the region were seen to undermine America's previous policies opposing external intervention and colonialism, and exacerbated Arab grievances and mistrust against the United States.

In summary, many political actors in the Middle East made the following evaluations early on: (1) the core foreign policy goals of the United States with respect to the Middle East were different from their own: for them, the removal of foreign dominance was paramount, whereas for the

United States this aspect was only instrumental to their economic interests and the blocking of Soviet encroachment; (2) the United States sought to protect the region's resources in order to supply and strengthen western democratic governments against communism and authoritarianism, and yet their ensuing intervention in the Middle East often helped to install or uphold undemocratic, unrepresentative regimes; (3) for the United States, the prevention of Soviet encroachment represented stability, whereas for regional actors the mandate system seemed merely to have been replaced by the establishment of Israel and *indirect* western control—thus the old status quo remained and still had to be challenged; (4) the United States supported the establishment and security of Israel: whereas the United States had disapproved of the perpetuation of the mandate system in the Middle East, this latest example of colonization, as the Arabs saw it, the “*Nakba*,” had US endorsement.

Truman's Policies and Syrian Skepticism

A closer look at some US policies formulated to achieve its NSC aims exemplifies the four areas of friction outlined above, and reveals the causes of dissatisfaction and early tensions between the United States and Syria. Three such policies were US support of a dictatorial coup, the Point Four program, and the Middle East Command (MEC). Featuring in some form in these policies, and aggravating matters, was the United States' preferential treatment of Israel.

Sponsoring Regime Change

Having previously shown little interest in Syria given its lack of economic significance, Washington became aware of the Soviet Union's paying it more attention. In 1949, the United States made its first intervention in Syria's fractious political scene to help General Husni al-Za'im overthrow the Quwatli government in a coup on March 30. The United States acknowledged that he was a “Banana Republic dictator type,”³² but despite this contradiction of outward US rhetoric for the pursuit of democracy, what mattered here was that the new dictator was recognized as someone who would work with the West and help them implement schemes for peace with Israel. Moreover, it was hoped he might bring stability to Syrian factionalism (even if that meant through repression) and that in turn he would be able to reduce Soviet influence in the country. And indeed, Za'im delivered to a large extent on these expectations: he signed an armistice with Israel and facilitated western economic interests by approving concessions for Tapline, which transported Aramco oil from Saudi

Arabia to the Mediterranean. He improved relations with Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a vital ally of the United States in the strategic interface between East and West, at a time when Turkey was experiencing a widening rift with its Middle Eastern neighbors. He unilaterally steered Syria away from a pan-Arab agenda toward western preferences, imprisoning Arab nationalists and stating:

The Syrian Republic wants neither Greater Syria nor Fertile Crescent. We will pit our forces against these two projects of foreign inspiration . . . we have assurances that Great Britain is for the status quo and that France and the United States would never accept a change in the situation.³³

Finally, he demonstrated himself as a useful ally in the Cold War by clamping down on communist factions in Syria and showing willingness to accept US military assistance in a clear signal that Syria was ready to throw its lot in with the United States. Unfortunately for the United States, Za'im was overthrown (and later assassinated) within four and a half months; thus, Truman's short-term link with Syria, hinging as it was on one individual, evaporated before it had really begun. The United States' historical tendency to operate through individuals in the Middle East in exclusion of other parties was a key reason why it was unable to build a stable bilateral relationship with Syria throughout the postindependence period, being so closely associated with the discredited Za'im regime.

Point Four Assistance

Two military coups followed Za'im: Sami al-Hinnawi lasted only a short period before General Adib ash-Shishakli ousted him in a coup in late 1949. The United States attempted to start afresh with the Shishakli regime, once again using the tool of material incentives to bring it in line with western strategy and interests in the region. The Truman administration had introduced the "Point Four program" as a way of propping up economically developed countries with financial and military assistance to prevent them from succumbing to Soviet influence; the logic here was not dissimilar to that of the Marshall Plan and the subsequent European Recovery Program (ERP) introduced two years earlier. The ERP was gradually beginning to bear fruit in Europe, fostering a far greater level of economic but also political cooperation between old allies and former enemies alike; it seemed reasonable to the United States that such a program might provide a significant route toward stability in the Middle East, as well as engender a deeper loyalty to the United States. Certainly, it reflected a long-term commitment

on the part of the United States, as opposed to ad hoc handouts given to temporary dictators.

The program of assistance was offered to the Syrian regime, but after ongoing negotiations, and stalling on the part of the Syrians, the opportunity for cooperation on this front was eventually rejected. Indeed, as the United States often reflected afterward, Syria was ultimately the only Arab state to “flatly refuse” US assistance through Point Four, and further economic aid offered for construction and development.³⁴

Why, then, was the program scuppered before it could make any meaningful progress? First, it is highly questionable whether the Americans’ analogy between the ERP and a potential Middle East economic program was an accurate one.³⁵ Shishakli refused assistance on the basis that it appeared to merely aid planning rather than actual implementation of reconstruction projects.

Second, the lack of trust on the Syrian side was too great. This mistrust was built on the recent history of US involvement in Syria’s coups, but particularly connected to US sympathy for Israel. The Syrians had the following ongoing grievances with regard to Israel, which they believed the United States had done nothing to rectify or was directly responsible for: (1) Israel’s refusal to comply with recent UN resolutions;³⁶ (2) the Palestinian refugee crisis, lack of any UN action on the issue, and continued US pressure on Arab states to settle refugees without any plans for repatriation;³⁷ (3) US and UN failure to push back Israel’s borders;³⁸ (4) the disregard of Arab demands for the internationalization of Jerusalem;³⁹ (5) no action over continued incursions by the Israelis over the Israeli-Syrian border;⁴⁰ (6) US endorsement of continued Jewish immigration into Israel;⁴¹ and (7) the fact that the Germans had been instructed to pay reparations to Israel for Jewish losses in the war, while nearly 1 million displaced Palestinians were denied any reparations from Israel.⁴² A State Department official concluded:

We find no recent easing [of] Arab Israel tension in Syria where [the] primary barrier to moderation is unresponsiveness of public opinion toward reasonable arguments.⁴³

and

[Shishakli] is determined to maintain and support Arab claims against Israel. Programs and policies conceived without recognition of these factors will find no ready acceptance in Syria.⁴⁴

Despite a military dictatorship being in place, this did not mean that Syrian politics and society had been stabilized and that the incumbent

regime was free from the threat of domestic opposition; this, coupled with Shishakli's personal opposition toward Israel, prevented the development of any positive and substantial relations between Syria and the United States.

At a time when US hegemony was assured and Syrian domestic politics was still fragile, sacrificing greater economic security that a US alliance would provide was highly significant and indicative of Syria's anti-imperialist priorities. Indeed, Syria remained consistent on this course, choosing not to request aid through the US Export-Import Bank or loans from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) as all of its neighbors had done.⁴⁵ It was stated:

Of all the Arab states, Syria . . . is the most wholeheartedly devoted to a neutralist policy with strong anti-Western overtones . . . The Syrians unlike any other Arabs feel themselves free of need to look to the West for any kind of support or help (they are economically self-sufficient).⁴⁶

This tendency of the Syrians to seek economic independence and self-sufficiency was unnerving for the United States: in the short term it prevented the United States from gaining political leverage, and in the long term it contributed to the view that the Syrians were singularly difficult to cooperate with.⁴⁷

The Middle East Command

If the Point Four program made little progress, the Middle East Command (MEC) was doomed to fail from the start. It was proposed by the United States as a way of prizing Egypt away from British control and to allow the strategic routes of the Suez Canal to be utilized for western economies on an equal basis. The United States sought to replace the existing (and constraining) Anglo-Egyptian Treaty with the MEC; it was presented favorably to the Arabs as a way of ending old colonial ties, whereas privately it had little to do with promoting Arab independence. The MEC would have a British Supreme Commander, links to NATO, and staff from the United States, France, Turkey, Egypt, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The MEC headquarters was to be based in Egypt, and in the event of war, Egypt was required to guarantee the MEC access to all facilities.

Ultimately, the proposal was counterproductive, prompting the Egyptians to both abrogate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and reject the MEC in October 1951.⁴⁸ Syria, although not specifically solicited to join the MEC, supported and encouraged Egyptian opposition on the basis that the head of the MEC was to be of a non-Arab nationality, western troops

would be based on Arab soil during peacetime, and lastly it seemed the MEC was being forced on the region.⁴⁹ The greatest impact of the MEC on US-Syrian relations was to aggravate Syrian public opinion against the West and make it even more difficult for any Syrian leader to cooperate with the United States.

What Syria had needed after independence was sustained financial help with development and reconstruction, support for its goal of carving out an independent niche for itself in regional politics, and chiefly arms for security. The United States certainly encouraged the Syrians to apply for assistance through global financial institutions, but these all took the form of loans or the reimbursement of cash rather than the provision of funds and equipment up front; moreover, any direct US aid tended to be offered on the condition of progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict, whether agreeing peace with Israel or the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Thus, in Syria's view, US aid was too complicated a pursuit;⁵⁰ it perceived a single-minded, anticommunist agenda, disconcertingly detached from the priorities and interests of the Arabs. Meanwhile, the United States contradicted its formally held position of supporting initiatives for Arab unity, now perceiving it as a channel for Soviet influence.

To exacerbate matters, Washington showed no signs of pressurizing Israel to compromise on any Arab demands. US policies and attitudes reflected, in the view of the Syrians, a complete misreading of the region's politics and a failure to appreciate the scars of its very recent history. It not only made them less willing to cooperate, but it instilled in them a fear of further problems and loss of independence that such cooperation could lead to in the future. Through this minimal interaction, the Truman administration had shifted the Syrian position from one of candidness and optimism toward the United States, to one of aloofness and suspicion.

Notes

1. Address by President Wilson delivered before a joint Congress on January 8, 1918.
2. The Report of the King-Crane Commission, August 28, 1919.
3. See: Eugene Rogan in Louise Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 27.
4. Acknowledged in retrospect by Henderson to the Secretary of State: "throughout the period between the two wars, there was no occasion for the United States to adopt a positive policy towards the Arabs," memo, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter referred to as *FRUS*), 8 (August 29, 1945), p. 26.
5. Such as the Anglo-Iraqi Agreement of 1930, and the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1936, established to maintain British presence in the region.

6. Although the popular nature of the movement is contested in some works, such as J. Gelvin (1998) and Stephen Heydemann (1999) (see: Charles Tripp, "Syria: The State and Its Narratives (Review Article)," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37 (2) (2001), 199–206), it should be noted that popular political participation was severely curtailed during the especially repressive French mandate (effectively occupation). Moreover, much of the dispute about the nature of popular Arab nationalism relates to the Arab revolt, rather than the anticolonial sentiment during the interwar period, which permeated all strata of society to a far greater extent. There is some reference in the US documents to Syrian agitation; for example, Engert to Washington, April 9, 1941, stated: "opposition to the French is on the increase among all classes," *FRUS*, 3 (1941), p. 696. The relative lack of documentation of Syrian politics in *FRUS* reflects in large degree American ambivalence about Syrian issues in the early years. However, widespread protests in rural and urban areas are extensively documented in the British Foreign Office Records. For an excellent exposition of these sources, see: Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920–1945* (I.B. Tauris, 1978), p. 167 and particularly chapter 7, which documents the grassroots nature of Syrian resistance to French rule. See also: Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945–1958* (Oxford University Press, 1965); Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba' th, 1963–66: Army-Party Symbiosis*, (Israel Universities Press, 1972), p. 11.
7. Salah al-Din Bitar and Michel 'Aflaq, *al-Qawmiyya al-'arabiyya wa mauqafuha min al-shuyu'iyya* (1944); cited in Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 149.
8. The Constitution of The Baath Arab Socialist Party of the First Party Congress: General Principles 1947.
9. Memo, Henderson to Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 8 (August 29, 1945), p. 27. He added, "...except in so far as there was a crystallization of Arab opinion on the Palestine question, making it necessary for this Government to take such opinion increasingly into account in the formulation of our policy toward Palestine."
10. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
11. Prepared by the Chief of the Division of Near East Affairs (Merriam) and submitted by Henderson to President Truman, *FRUS*, 8 (early August 1945), p. 48.
12. See: footnote no. 27, 890.50/10-945 in *FRUS*, 8 (1945), p. 44.
13. *FRUS*, 8 (1945), p. 1078.
14. See: *FRUS*, 5 (1944), "The Near East Region," with the vast majority of communication devoted to the issue of access to petroleum and maintaining US-Saudi relations for this purpose: for example, memo, Acting Secretary of State to Diplomatic Missions in the American Republics, 5 (February 14, 1944), p. 23; memo, Interdivisional Petroleum Committee to State Dept, 5 (April 11, 1944), p. 29; Cuthbertson to Secretary of State (November 15, 1944).
15. For positive Arab responses, see: Henderson to Vaughan, *FRUS*, 8 (November 10, 1945), p. 10. In private, the main reason cited for opposing great powers' presence in the Middle East was that it discriminated against American access

- to resources in the region (memo from Henderson to Grew, *FRUS*, 8 (July 23, 1945), p. 19).
16. Declaration of Atlantic Charter, *FRUS*, 3 (August 14, 1941), p. 367, plus 1 (1942), p. 25.
 17. Conference of Chiefs of Mission in the Near East with President Truman: reported by Henderson to Brigadier Vaughan, Military Aide to Truman, *FRUS*, 8 (November 10, 1945), p. 10.
 18. George Wadsworth, US Minister to Syria-Lebanon, to President Truman on behalf of himself and ministers to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jerusalem, Conference of Chiefs of Mission with the President, *FRUS*, 8 (November 10, 1945), pp. 13–15.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
 20. Cases such as the Syrian-American crisis (elaborated further on), but also the US dispute with Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq in 1953, early support for British presence in the Suez Canal zone, initiation of the Omega policy to undermine Nasser, and pushing Jordan away from pan-Arabism and the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958: all put the United States in a negative light and erased much of the goodwill that Arab states previously had toward it.
 21. Hoskins, the Acting Regional Planning Adviser Near East Office, stated to Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for the Near Eastern Affairs, “It is hard for many Americans, unless they have recently visited certain parts of this area, to realize how general and how deep-seated is the distrust and in some cases hatred for the British and the French because of their past or present colonial policies and activities . . . the US is increasingly being put in the same imperialist category”: memo, *FRUS*, 9 (April 7, 1952), p. 204.
 22. In 1944, when the United States was formulating its postwar Middle East policy, the US Acting Secretary of State stated, “we are actively engaged in developing a firm post war foreign oil policy” *FRUS*, (February 14, 1944), p. 23; later, this priority was confirmed when the Petroleum Committee at the State Department stated: “toward Iran, Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula, including Saudi Arabia proper . . . it is primarily with respect to these Middle East areas that United States policy must be formulated and implemented” (April 11, 1944, *ibid.*, 29). These states gained greater importance after the onset of the Cold War, while Syria only became significant in US calculations after it showed signs of developing closer links with the Soviet Union.
 23. See: Lesch, *Political Reassessment*, p. 1; and for more on United States’ strategic shift away from isolation to adopting a global foreign policy, see: Michael Cox, “Whatever Happened to American Decline? International Relations and the New US Hegemony,” *New Political Economy*, 6 (2001), pp. 311–340.
 24. Dulles’ speech “Six Major Policy Issues,” June 1, 1953, following Dulles’ trip to the Middle East, May 11–29, 1953: cited in David Lesch, *Syria and the United States—Eisenhower’s Cold War in the Middle East* (Westview, 1992), p. 33.
 25. Cited in Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, p. 17.
 26. *Ibid.*

27. See: George Wadsworth's remarks to President Truman for Arab expectations and allusion to the West's differential treatment toward Europeans and Arabs, *FRUS*, 8 (November 10, 1945), pp. 13–15.
28. That is, in terms of democratization and individual liberties—see examples on aiding illegal seizures of political power in Syria, plus similar attempts in Iran.
29. Memo, Henderson to Secretary of State on the “Attitude of the United States toward the Question of Arab Union,” *FRUS*, 8 (August 8, 1945), pp. 25–29.
30. For example, excellent works by Nigel Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan, and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (Macmillan, 1996); and B. Saunders, *The United States and Arab Nationalism—The Syrian Case, 1953–60* (Praeger, 1996), which address the Syrian-American crisis or Suez Crisis, but offer only a cursory look at the wider background.
31. House Resolutions 418 and 419, February 1, 1944, outlined in memo from Berle to Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 5 (January 28, 1944), p. 1944. It contradicted the 30,000 limit imposed by the British mandate and, in the view of Arabs, the US pledge to support Arab rights and unity in the Atlantic Charter.
32. Cited in Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, p. 18—quoted in Douglas Little, “Cold War and Covert Action: The United States and Syria, 1945–1958,” *Middle East Journal*, 44 (1) (Winter 1990), pp. 55–56.
33. Za'im in an interview with Journal d'Egypte (Cairo), April 27, 1949, cited in Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 56–57.
34. Briefing paper prepared in the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 8 (December 17, 1954), p. 514.
35. See: A. Enterline and M. Grieg, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4 (2008), pp. 321–247, who argue that the forging of a democratic system through such economic programs is by no means assured, and that exporting same strategies based on historical analogies is flawed.
36. For example, *FRUS*, 9 (May 18, 1951) UN Security Council Resolution: Cannon to State Department, p. 875.
37. National Intelligence Estimate, *FRUS*, 9 (January 15, 1953), p. 337.
38. *Ibid.*, 338.
39. *Ibid.*
40. US Minister to Syria, Cannon to State Department, *FRUS*, 9 (May 5, 1952), p. 924.
41. Department of State Position Paper on Syria, *FRUS*, 9 (May 5, 1953), p. 1207.
42. Cannon to State Department, *FRUS*, 9 (March 3, 1952), p. 901; the suggestion tabled by the Syrians was promptly refused by US Secretary of State Dean Acheson, *FRUS*, 9 (March 12, 1952), p. 909.
43. Cannon to State Department, *FRUS*, 9 (March 11, 1952), p. 908.
44. Cannon to State Department, *FRUS*, 9 (September 25, 1952), p. 1011.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Briefing paper prepared in the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 8 (December 17, 1954), p. 513.
47. *Ibid.*

48. The Syrian press in October 1951 attacked Egypt for even considering acceptance of the MEC, putting this down to Egyptian self-interest and desire to monopolize the Arab League. Thus, Egyptian opposition of the West was influenced by negative opinion in the region in general: Telegram, Damascus to Foreign Office, October 25, 1951, British National Archives (hereafter referred to as UKNA), FO371/91850.
49. Memo, Hoskins to Byroade, *FRUS*, 1952–1954, 9 (July 25, 1952), p. 261.
50. Syria resented the conditions it was asked to meet—such as solvency before the granting of loans from the IBRD—which Israel apparently was not: Damascus to FO, UKNA FO371/91863 (January 8, 1951), ; moreover, despite numerous offers of aid by the United States, Syria constantly turned to alternative sources of aid, such as Britain and France, from whom the Syrians tried to buy secondhand weapons (see: UKNA File FO371/104216, January–February 1953). These efforts reflect the extent to which Syria refused to be indebted to the United States for arms or finance, conscious of the political conditions that would be attached.

Independence, Coups, and Revolution

Domestic Politics and the Role of Popular Movements, 1946–1954

The previous sections looked at Syria's interaction with the United States at the leadership level. Prior to independence, the presence of French forces prevented any meaningful Syrian leadership in foreign affairs, while post independence the fledgling state was dominated by a series of coups and counter-coups, bringing in autocratic military leaders—thus, in terms of policy, it has been appropriate to focus on the elite level. However, the development of politics on the ground among competing popular movements needs to be explored in more detail, particularly since they began to have an increasing influence on top-level decision-making. There was a notable intensification of popular politics opposed to both Israel and the United States during the Truman administration and in the early years of his successor, which spread in a bottom-up process. Also in this period, strengthening ties developed between Syria and the Soviet Union resulting from the strong ideological trajectory of Syrian domestic politics.

The Impact of Syria's State Formation

There are a number of distinct trends in Syria's state formation that need to be highlighted by way of explanation. First, the imposition of the state system in the Middle East was an immense structural change; internal strife and colonial intervention prevented it from having any chance of becoming a settled and functioning characteristic of the region. By the Second World War, the Arab states were still campaigning to attain a status nominally granted to them 20 years before. By the time Syria had

gained independence in 1946, the momentum for a positive transition and political change had been lost, allowing factionalism and entanglement of foreign affairs in domestic politics to become entrenched in the political structure. This was more evident in Syria than in Egypt, for example, since its new borders had created a greater upheaval in identity and political administration.

It was in this context of insecurity that foreign support was constantly sought by disputing factions to shore up their own power; the interference of outside forces in Syrian affairs, whether they were French, British, Iraqi, Jordanian, or Egyptian, meant that Syria could not challenge them alone with its limited military resources, and needed the additional threat of a more powerful state to gain any credibility.¹ Foreign involvement in Syrian affairs also meant that Arab nationalist ideology, which drew its relevance from the interference of external forces, could remain paramount not just for foreign policy but also for the state's domestic politics.

Another significant feature of Syria's domestic politics, which in turn affected its standing on the international stage and subsequent bilateral relations with external powers, was the lack of ownership of foreign affairs; until independence, this remained strictly in the hands of the French, producing a vacuum upon their withdrawal. There was, therefore, a lack of Syrian representation in discussions between the West and the Middle East, particularly at times of crisis. The United States was able to strike up a significant diplomatic rapport with both Egypt and Iraq, even though both were also inclined toward an Arab nationalist agenda in the postwar period; this was something it failed to achieve with Syria.² It is possible to draw a connection here between the more revolutionary, "radical" direction of the Syrian Arab nationalist movement (compared to the tempered nationalism found elsewhere) and its lack of representation at a higher and more consequential level of politics, where the opportunity (or necessity) for dialogue and pragmatic considerations can often dilute an unwavering ideological stance, which is more easily maintained in an isolated, domestic context.

Another factor contributing to Syria's relative marginalization in international affairs was, of course, the nature of the mandatory division between Britain and France; those countries historically attached to Britain also inherited more substantial attention and contact with the United States as a result of the close Anglo-American relationship. The old French mandates, however, were disadvantaged by overbearing French control,³ as well as poorer links between France and the United States: consequently, Syria had much less representation on the international stage, at ambassadorial level and at the UN, than its neighbors. This contributed to Washington's perception that Syria had less influence on

collective Arab politics than its better-established and politically cohesive peers.

Public Opinion

Both the entanglement of foreign and domestic issues, and the alienation of ideological parties from the domestic and international setting combined to form a particularly “radical,” revolutionary setting for domestic politics in Syria. The wider the gap felt between the masses and the political elite, be they foreign occupiers, wealthy notables, or military autocrats, the more likely the masses were to create an alternative political platform that was more inclusive, more idealistic, and certainly more critical toward both the regime and external powers. Thus, while this chapter focuses on the decisions and diplomacy of the elite, their standpoints—particularly moments of intransigence and opposition—cannot be understood without recognizing the popular pressure influencing their policies. US correspondence with other regimes in the region demonstrates the extent to which public animosity toward Israel and the West played a greater role in Syrian decision-making than in other states; US legates in Syria, their British or French counterparts, and the Syrian officials themselves regularly alluded to this constraint in any dealings with the West, manifested in Syria’s unique lack of cooperation or participation in a number of US-led defense or economic programs.

This public influence was demonstrated even when the United States had relatively easy relations with Syrian officials in power in the late 1940s,⁴ and had not yet been directly exposed to such anti-western public sentiment. Initially, in the autumn of 1950, the United States viewed the unsettled nature of the Syrian state as presenting a positive opportunity: if it could capitalize on the uncertainty to create economic links with the Syrians, that might enable it to reduce ties with “reactionary regimes” such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia and promote reform in the region.⁵ With their greater experience of the region, the British advised caution in such a plan, arguing that “the intense nationalistic and anti-imperialist sentiment in Syria could constitute a barrier.”⁶ This was echoed by Ma’ruf Al-Dawalibi, the Syrian Minister of National Economy, when he expressed to James Keeley, the US minister in Syria:

Syrian public opinion hold US partly responsible for plight [of] refugees and believes that if true to its oft-expressed ideals, US should take lead in enforcing UN decisions, particularly, as Arab states were stopped by US-UN action in defending inalienable rights of Palestine Arabs. As long as Arab refugees are denied these rights . . . Syrian opinion will remain exacerbated and any

Syrian statesman who seeks cooperation with US in political or economic sphere will be plagued by criticism and opposition because of US connection with Palestine tragedy.⁷

Outside of government, speaking to Syrian journalists, Keeley found that while they were not averse to closer economic relations with the United States, there remained a “deep-seated chagrin” at the US support of Israel to the disadvantage of the Arabs, while the fear of further Israeli aggression made “almost everyone suspicious of our professed good intentions.”⁸ Many US officials, even those stationed in the region, held a dim view of this antipathy; they felt Syria had no business in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and should prioritize their own economic matters.⁹ This to some extent justifies the Syrian perception that the United States did not understand their grievances—a perception that was greatly affecting Syria’s political course. Mustafa Siba’i of the Islamic Socialist Front,¹⁰ highlighted by the United States as an important anti-western group, declared:

We are resolved to turn towards the eastern camp if the Democracies do not give us justice . . . To those that say the eastern camp is our enemy we would answer: when has the western camp been our friend? . . . we will bind ourselves to Russia were she the very devil.¹¹

Nevertheless, the United States proceeded to tour the Arab states in an attempt to co-opt support from the emerging neutralist regimes. George McGhee, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, who had initially touted the project, was at last able to witness this public opposition during his visit to Syria. It was by this stage being expressed vocally and regularly against the European powers, Israel, and increasingly the United States, on the streets of Damascus and in the press.¹² Before the official visit, a coalition of opposition groups made up of the Ba‘th, the Arab Socialist Party, and the Islamic Socialist Front declared their policy of strict neutrality toward both the United States and the Soviet Union; students petitioned and rallied against the British and American arrivals; and workers sent letters of protest to western ministers in Syria.¹³ The Ba‘th, emerging as a strong and popular nationalist force by this stage, followed up with a manifesto in January 1951, stating:

The Arab nation fighting to free itself from Anglo-French-American imperialism . . . warns the Arab League against making any gesture of adhesion to one or other of the two blocs; it holds to a genuine neutralism which

will prevent Western imperialism making the Fatherland a strategic base and exploiting its oil resources for military ends . . .¹⁴

During and after the representatives' trip in February and March, there were attempted bombings at the British consulate in Aleppo and at the US minister's residence in Damascus.¹⁵ However, such public protests did not deter the West from pursuing their Middle East defense strategy, although they felt vindicated in their choice to leave Syria out of their plans for the Middle East Command. Alongside their leaders' opposition to the proposals, the Syrian public marched in thousands after Friday prayers to protest against the United States and Britain, and to pledge their support for the Egyptians in the face of "imperialist plots."¹⁶

Meanwhile, political groups used allegations of supporting the West to bring down their rivals and cause significant political changes at home; the following were all deposed consecutively for cooperating with the West: the conservative Quwatli in 1946, the dictators Za'im and Hinnawi in 1949, and two successive prime ministers serving under General Shishakli—Nazim Al-Qudsi and Hasan al Hakim¹⁷—ousted for not rejecting and condemning the MEC in public in 1951. Thus, it was not just the case that domestic politics influenced foreign policy, but foreign affairs similarly had a major impact on domestic issues.

This became more evident when General Shishakli was overthrown in 1954; the relatively free elections that followed demonstrated the extent to which anti-western, ideological parties had worked underground to strengthen their support base and become consolidated, political organizations. They now came to the fore, with the Syrian public voting overwhelmingly in favor of neutralist parties and independents. The Ba'ath had made the greatest progress among the parties—having secured only one seat in the Syrian Chamber in the 1949 elections, they now emerged as the second largest party close behind the conservative People's Party, whose numbers had halved since the last election. Some of the notable individuals to be elected were Salah al-Din Bitar, cofounder of the Ba'ath; Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, a conservative in the People's Party but also leading member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood; Khalid al-'Azm, a strong proponent of neutralism and standing as an independent; and Khalid Baqdash, leader of the Communist Party. The results did not so much reflect the rise of the Left in Syria, but a popular response to perceived US pressure on the Syrian government to align with the West.¹⁸ This important distinction was often overlooked in the United States; thus, the day after the elections on October 25, the Cairo daily *Al-Ahram* announced "Syria rejects all pacts with the West," whereas the American press reported the elections as a victory for communism in the Arab world.¹⁹

Syrian-Soviet Relations

While Syria was not about to adopt Soviet ideology, it did welcome relations with a superpower that at least recognized Arab priorities in the region, and at best shared their goals of combating pro-Israeli, western interference.

There are three key factors to highlight with respect to the Syrian-Soviet connection: first, there was a convergence in regional goals between the Soviet Union and Syria, as both sought to remove western control. While the Soviet Union had been one of the foremost supporters of the establishment of Israel, it had gradually begun to backtrack from this position by the early 1950s, seeing the strong pro-western course that Israel had adopted. After the fall of Hasan Al-Hakim's government in October 1951, the new Prime Minister Ma'ruf Al-Dawalibi—anti-western and anti-Hashemite—learned from his predecessors' downfall and advocated a firmer neutralist stance. He was one of the first in the Arab world to call for a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and the purchase of arms from the East instead of the West;²⁰ in response, the American press labeled him as “the most outspoken anti-American Arab leader.”²¹

Second, it is important to note that the USSR and Syria were not in complete alignment to the extent that Syria was a Soviet satellite in the region; indeed, there were significant disagreements between the two. It was a negative ideological alliance in that their opposition toward the United States and the West, and not a self-standing unity, defined their alignment;²² this subtlety was often lost on the Americans, who regularly conflated Arab nationalism with communism.

Third, increased Soviet-Syrian ties served to perpetuate the existing suspicion and coldness between the United States and Syria—for the Americans, this gave further currency to their formative view that the Syrians were an unruly and intransigent, obstructionist force in the region, one whose opinions were unreliable and need not be taken into strong consideration, whereas for the Syrians, American reactions to their links with the USSR confirmed their impression of the United States as a self-interested party in the region bent on monopolizing all power and allegiances for itself. The instability of Syrian domestic politics in this time had greatly contributed to its marginalization in US considerations for the region, viewed as incapable of dictating its own affairs. While to a certain extent this had been the case, in large part due to French occupation, the internal developments and subsequent radicalization of Syrian Arab nationalism had in fact a major influence on regional politics and provided continued impetus to anti-westernism in the region. As Seale argues, “to have an Arab policy at that time was to have a policy regarding Syria.”²³

The United States did not fully appreciate this, while arguably the Soviet Union did; thus, instead of recognizing that Soviet strategic calculations were crucially at play here, efficiently taking advantage of Syria's regional concerns, the United States viewed the Syrians as being willfully inclined toward communism. The United States did not compete with the Soviet Union for Syria's alliance, as it did over Israel and Egypt, and by the time the Americans recognized Syria's importance and sought to challenge Soviet influence, it was too late.

From this account of radicalization and popularization of ideological politics and foreign policy in Syria, it is possible to understand the context of US policies toward Syria and the region under President Eisenhower. The next section looks at the Baghdad Pact, the Suez Crisis, and the Syrian-American crisis of 1957, which served to bring US-Syrian relations to a new nadir.

US-Syrian Relations under Eisenhower

Despite the above developments in Syria's internal politics and affiliation with the Soviet Union, there was renewed optimism in both Syria and the Arab world immediately after Eisenhower came to power in January 1953.²⁴ After the one-sidedness of the Truman administration, it was generally considered that both the president and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sought to operate foreign policy in the Middle East on a more "even-handed basis between Israel and the Arabs."²⁵

However, despite the fact that Arab opinion toward the United States was at such a critical juncture, and given the rising tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, there remained as before a hierarchy of threats for the Eisenhower administration, with communism at the top, followed by anti-western nationalism, and finally imperialism.²⁶ Thus, in spite of Eisenhower's more comprehensive appreciation for the importance of the Middle East compared to Truman, Syrian disappointments were not about to be overturned. Moreover, for all the rhetoric that the United States sympathized with Arab nationalist aspirations, the United States' key alliances being forged in the region were with those conservative, "reactionary" regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, for whom Arab nationalism represented a threat both to their self-interests as dynastic rulers and to their ideological opposition toward communist influence in the region.²⁷

The strategic importance of the region has already been outlined, but in the above context, and after the communist coup in Czechoslovakia, the Korean War, and the fall of Chiang Kai-shek in China, the Middle East had become indispensable for the United States. By the 1950s, the

potential of this importance was fully realized not just for the United States but for the entire western economy, upon which Western Europe based its postwar reconstruction. British government figures for early 1956 showed that Europe imported roughly 93 million tons of crude oil, 90 percent of which came from the Middle East; demand for crude oil products had increased by 17.4 percent in just two years between 1954 and 1956.²⁸ The favored means of protecting such economic interests was by providing military assistance to allies in the region—this doubled up as defense against any potential Soviet military threat from the East, but also as a political gesture that these countries were indebted to the United States and under its influence.²⁹

The Baghdad Pact and the Suez Crisis

Despite the evident opposition to such projects, the prospect of a pro-western regional defense plan resurfaced again in 1953—no longer as the MEC, but via the Baghdad Pact (later renamed as Central Treaty Organization), drawing help from South Asia and Turkey (the so-called Northern Tier) to protect the Middle East for British and American interests. Aware that such a pact might provoke greater anti-westernism, the United States still took a calculated gamble in promoting it—not doing so would make little positive difference to relations between the United States and neutralist states, it was argued.³⁰ Following the revolution in Egypt, its nationalist leader Gamal Abdel Nasser rejected the Baghdad Pact, creating unprecedented tensions between the Egyptians and the British. Eventually, in 1956, Britain provoked matters by refusing to fund the building of the Aswan Dam, to which Nasser responded by blocking British access to the Suez Canal, a cornerstone of British Middle Eastern strategy. The ensuing Suez Crisis involving Britain, France, Israel, Egypt, Syria, and the two superpowers had a marked impact for Arab-West relations.

Syria's role in all this was significant, effectively holding the "casting vote" among the Arab states on the future of the pact. February 1955 saw the demise of the conservatives in the Syrian Chamber due to their equivocation on the issue, and the forming of a new and more emphatically anti-western government³¹—once it had expressed its opposition to the Baghdad Pact, other states followed suit, reassuring Egypt that it would not be isolated in its standoff against the British.³² Moreover, the Syrians continued to support Egypt against the West by sending their own troops into the conflict of 1956.

The crisis also confirmed the growing convergence of Soviet and Syrian Arab nationalist interests in the region. Thus, the Soviet Union entered the fray in the last few months of the crisis, declaring it would send troops in

if Britain and France did not withdraw. Suspected to be an empty threat, it did little to sway the conflict, but it certainly raised Soviet currency with the nationalists. Furthermore, after years of rejected requests for arms from the United States, the Syrians now had a willing supplier in the Soviet Union, receiving £100 million worth of arms from the Soviet Union between 1954 and 1957.³³ Nasser's successful resistance against the West persuaded the Soviet Union of the advantages in providing the Arabs with the proper means to continue such resistance in the future, especially with the United States keenly pursuing defense pacts with these same states. Hence, the lines of Cold War alliances were drawn up in the Middle East, and the fearful prognostics of communist takeovers appeared, in the eyes of the United States, dangerously imminent in Syria.³⁴

The Syrian-American Crisis

It was in this regional context of western setbacks, emboldened Arab nationalism, and Soviet intervention that the Syrian-American crisis developed in 1957. Syria's leftist coalition during the Suez Crisis was interpreted by the United States as a communist domination of Syrian politics.³⁵ The United States was further alarmed at the speed with which the Russians had been able to secure a Syrian alliance and the damage it was capable of inflicting on western interests in the region. It was no longer viable to take a passive approach to the internal affairs of Arab states: while in the past the United States had clandestinely supported individuals who were already in search for power, the United States would now be willing to actively instigate the overthrow of "dangerous" regimes. There had already been an aborted attempt to overthrow the Syrian government in the run-up to Suez, masterminded by Britain and Iraq;³⁶ the United States had been privy to those plans but did not participate—they now sought to carry out the task more efficiently, using their growing dominance of the region.

Fearing imminent Soviet intervention in the region, this new US strategy was publicly declared with the Eisenhower Doctrine in March 1957. In it, Eisenhower demanded alignment against "the East," not just the Soviet Union but its Arab allies as well; he stipulated that the United States would strengthen the internal security of any state threatened by "International Communism" and would provide military assistance against communist aggression. The doctrine imposed a bipolar context onto local conflicts, recasting them as extensions of the Cold War.

Using the doctrine as a mandate to intervene, James Richards, the new Special Assistant for Middle East Affairs, and Loy Henderson, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, toured the region in March and August 1957

respectively to enlist support from regional states, and in turn to isolate Syria from its neighbors.³⁷ Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq were all consulted by the United States and gave their endorsement to the Eisenhower Doctrine; neither US representative made any contact with Damascus throughout the ensuing crisis.

Meanwhile, amid its growing isolation, increased frequency of Israeli attacks on the border,³⁸ and the progress of Soviet-Syrian relations in the previous two years, Syria's defense minister Khalid al-'Azm travelled to the Soviet Union to sign a technical and economic agreement with the Soviet Union. This was viewed by the United States as the sign that Syria had become a Soviet satellite. Within a week, on August 12, the Syrians announced the discovery of a US plot to overthrow the regime.³⁹ There appeared to be ample evidence that the United States had been behind the plot, enlisting the help of former dictator Shishakli and attempting to recruit a number of Syrian officers to the plan. In response, and in a show of defiance, the Syrian government expelled three US diplomats—Robert Malloy, Howard Stone, and Francis Jetton—and purged a number of Syrian officers; this, in turn, was reciprocated by the United States with the expulsion of the Syrian ambassador, Farid Zayn-al Din, and his staff from Washington.

The crisis did not dissipate with the above dismissals. Syria, seeking to close ranks after the scare, replaced its former chief of staff with the Soviet sympathizer 'Afif al-Bizri. For the United States, this change signaled the inevitable communist takeover that they had feared.⁴⁰ It sent arms to those of its allies neighboring Syria, while Henderson briefed Turkish, Iraqi, and Jordanian leaders on a plan of action. He urged them to ensure that any armed action undertaken should be defensible at the UN, and is reported to have stated that "[Any] action must be one hundred per cent successful when you decide on it. It is our belief that if there is to be action it must be efficient."⁴¹ The United States had traditionally relied on Turkey to put pressure on Damascus; they now instructed it to send its troops to the Turkish-Syrian border. The Soviet Union responded by sending two warships to Syria's aid.

However, Turkey was not able to muster enough regional support for its actions, given its close association with the West and unhealed rifts with its Arab neighbors since the First World War. Other conservative Arab states were becoming increasingly uncomfortable with US belligerence, and were facing mounting domestic criticism at a time of renewed nationalism. Thus, Saudi Arabia intervened at this crucial stage, mediating between the Americans and Arab states to moderate their positions toward Syria.

Due to the strength of nationalist fervor coming off the back of the Suez Crisis, key Arab states eventually refused to act against the Syrians,⁴² and

the US project failed. Nevertheless, the incident had a significant and long-term impact on US-Syrian relations. It marked the beginning of a profound hostility toward the United States and feeling of “imperialist victimisation” on Syria’s part.⁴³ Years of suspicion and anti-westernism were confirmed and justified by the crisis; having previously marginalized Syria in regional affairs, the one time the United States had recognized Syria’s importance had led to a violation of its sovereignty. That the Syrians had initially held a degree of optimism for prospects under the Eisenhower administration made the Syrians all the more mistrustful of future American governments.

For the United States, the fear of Soviet penetration had led them to instigate direct regime change, regardless of how counterproductive it might prove in the end. It demonstrated a reactionary approach and disregard for Syria’s strategic value except in relation to the Cold War. This limited analysis of Syria’s importance was demonstrated by the United States’ satisfaction at the eventual outcome of the crisis, which ironically saw Nasser taking over from Saudi Arabia as mediator, thereby drawing Syria away from the USSR and inclining it closer toward Egyptian pan-Arabism.⁴⁴ In the US view, the fact that Syria was now far more hostile toward them, severely hindering future relations, was an unfortunate, but not a calamitous (and certainly not the worst) turn of events. Once again, the United States demonstrated its willingness to sponsor a military coup in order to replace an unallied government in the Middle East. Furthermore, despite acquiring a far greater knowledge of the region and ability to assess the situation accurately, the Eisenhower administration had demonstrated the same propensity to translate all regional issues through a Cold War lens.

Western-sponsored regional intervention in its domestic politics had greatly undermined Syria’s political cohesion. Fearing further destabilization in the aftermath of the Syrian-American crisis, Syria decided to enter into a political union with Egypt in 1958, its stronger Arab nationalist ally, as a means of protection. Syria saw out the remainder of the Eisenhower administration and the arrival of President Kennedy as a bystander in the United Arab Republic (UAR). It was to be a short-lived union, before Syria made its reentry as an independent and key regional actor in the volatile decade to follow.

Syria and the United States after the UAR: From Ally to Enemy

Nasser might have exploited anti-western sentiment, but supporting his leadership of the Arab nationalist movement actually served American interests, as the United States depended on him as a restraining force over the more “radicalized” and unpredictable Arab nationalists in Syria.

Despite initial reservations, the United States viewed the UAR as a positive feature on the Middle East scene, not bringing stability through Arab unity, as Syria had hoped, but through the subservience of a radical force to one whose revisionism was limited and compatible with the status quo. US dismay at the Syrian rebellion against the UAR in 1961 reflected this position.⁴⁵ The following highlights their negative assessment of the Syrians and how that played into their policy-making:

It should be emphasized...that the Syrians have traditionally been [a] highly individualistic and undisciplined people and that Syrian political movements, no matter what the coloration or how well unified at the inception, have always degenerated into squabbling factions and rivalries... which the communists are better equipped to deal with than we are.⁴⁶

Hence, the United States viewed Syria as an inherently problematic and uncooperative feature on the Middle East scene—from such statements it is evident that a historical intransigence toward each other was becoming embedded on *both* the American and Syrian sides.

A Brief Alliance

The United States initially feared that “an independent Syria” would become even more hostile toward Israel, and thus at first concluded that Syria’s defection went against US interests.⁴⁷ But based on reports that the rebels were, in fact, “fairly well-disposed toward the West,”⁴⁸ the United States began to see the potential advantages of the breakup, and covertly encouraged the new Syrian regime to pursue a pro-western course.⁴⁹ The new Syrian premier was Ma’mun Kuzbari, holding the positions of prime minister, defense minister, and foreign minister, ruling by decree, and considered as someone capable of “changing his political orientation at will”⁵⁰—but yet again, the implications for Syrian domestic politics and the potential fragility of the regime did not instill caution in American support. Kuzbari held communists in prison, was very much on the Right of Syrian politics, and pledged closer political and economic relations with the United States than Syria had ever permitted in the past.⁵¹ His ministers began immediately by requesting an aid agreement, which even took the United States by surprise, acknowledging that “Syria never previously was willing to negotiate.”⁵² Thus, in order to support the regime’s survival, the United States agreed to provide political and economic support; they indicated they would even consider supplying arms, something they had never previously been willing to do.⁵³

In a private memo outlining US policy toward Syria, Battle, Executive Secretary at the State Department, noted that despite poor prospects for political stability, it would continue to encourage the present regime and "discourage internal realignments detrimental to our interests." The United States also wanted to prevent external actors from causing trouble for the "friendly" Syrian regime, outlining that it would try to restrain Israel from provoking them.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the United States decided that there should be greater cultural exchanges and visits between the countries, it would engage Syria in the UN and with other western and Latin American countries, and it would also direct European countries to supply arms to Syria (believing that a benign source of arms would have a major role in maintaining stability in Syria). The United States also planned to provide training and technical assistance, and financial loans from the Development Loan Fund, and to respond to Syrian requests for surplus foodstuffs (worth over \$15 million under the PL480 assistance program).⁵⁵ The United States pledged to promote US-Syrian trade, help build a free enterprise system, and encourage the International Monetary Fund and other countries to assist with up to \$40 million worth of loans and the restoration of a free currency.⁵⁶ Finally, the United States guaranteed it would secure the private payment of outstanding and unpaid fees from Tapline to Syria in the region of \$8 million.⁵⁷

The first test for the US-Syrian alliance came in October 1961, when Israel planned to divert Jordanian waters to the Negev, and began planning for a nuclear energy program. The United States did little to restrain Israel, for it believed Israeli military superiority would inhibit Arab attacks and encourage stability.⁵⁸ When the Syrians did express strong opposition to Israeli intentions, the United States attributed it to "troublemaking" from the Egyptians, rather than genuine disagreement with Israel, and urged the Syrians to keep to the existing armistice.⁵⁹ Yet, even this pro-western Syrian government could not accept the US assessment of the issue, and lamented its failure to recognize that "Syria and other Arabs are still at war with Israel."⁶⁰

To further exacerbate tensions, and despite the official cease-fire, clashes between Syrians and Israelis on the disputed territory of Lake Tiberias were occurring with increasing frequency in February and March of 1962. Israel accused the Syrians of sparking the crisis by firing rifles at Israeli fishermen and Israeli police patrol; Syria pointed to Israeli raids over the border, targeting Syrian gun positions on March 16–17. While accepting that Israel had "applied force of much greater magnitude than that directed against Israel," the United States focused its efforts on restraining Syria.⁶¹ Syria, in protest against the US passivity, threatened to take the matter to the UN

Security Council, seeking to induce the UN to compel Israel to comply with partition and refugee resolutions, or otherwise face expulsion from the UN.⁶² Syria also demanded that the US government take a public position against Israeli diversion of waters from Jordan, threatening in private the “destruction [of the] US’s position in the Middle East, an advancement of Soviet causes therein, and risk of Arab-Israeli war.”⁶³

However, throughout this episode it is notable that, while of course the United States still maintained its support for Israel, it was more willing to castigate the Israelis in public, not merely to prevent Syria from turning toward the Soviet Union, but out of a genuine belief that Israeli actions were inflammatory. Hence, US responses deliberately emphasized condemnation of Israeli retaliations.⁶⁴

Kuzbari’s regime did not last long, as was often the case with pro-western regimes in Syria, and was overthrown within two years; what, therefore, is the significance of this short episode of Syrian history, so soon eclipsed by the Ba‘thist revolution, in understanding the history of US-Syrian relations? There are a number of important conclusions that can be drawn from this case.

First, the speed and assurance with which the United States was willing to support the new regime, describing it as “the best and most pro-Western in a decade . . . [that] deserves our immediate support,”⁶⁵ reflects the continued fear with which the United States contemplated a nationalist regime that might be opposed toward it and favorable toward the Soviet Union. So much so that it was willing to overlook previous misgivings about the volatility of Syrian politics, and the fact that this was yet another military dictatorship, despite all reports from the region advising that the regime was unlikely to survive for long.⁶⁶

Second, it becomes increasingly evident from a reading of the documents that the US policy on Syria was unsophisticated (particularly compared to the calculated and nuanced approach adopted in its Egyptian and Saudi policies), lacked a coherent strategy, and was based on a muddled reading of Syria’s importance in the region. Thus, on one hand, Syria was significant enough to prompt a risky, and ultimately damaging, US-sponsored coup in 1957, but on the other hand, there remained a lingering perception that investing support and aid in Syria would not produce much headway for the United States in the region—as a US official put it, “from a strategic point of view, is it more important to cozy up to five-million volatile Syrians or to make our peace with the largest and most influential country of the Arab world?”⁶⁷ In the US view, Syria was not a key bilateral counterpart in the region, with whom to negotiate and compromise—its unreliability so far had made that unnecessary—but it had the capacity to be either an instrument or a hindrance to US

strategy, and when those occasions arose, the United States merely reacted to exploit, thwart, or redirect events.

A third issue to highlight is the depth of Syrian-Israeli antipathy, as well as US support for Israel, which has always been a central and negative factor in US-Syrian relations; even with the most cooperative of Syrian regimes, Israel remained an obstacle to closer US-Syrian relations (the only Syrian leader to adopt a positive policy toward Israel had been Husni Za'im, who lasted less than five months in power). Nevertheless, the United States still urged greater restraint on Israel and was more willing to apportion equal blame on both Syria and Israel when a friendly Syrian regime was in place.

Finally, it is worth noting that any regime following Kuzbari would be fully aware of the support—technical, financial, and political—that the United States had been willing to provide a pro-western regime. The immediate withdrawal of that assistance would fuel any existing opposition and resentment toward the United States. It would, of course, also justify and provide conclusive evidence for the new regime that the United States was supporting its domestic enemies and was seeking to undermine its ideological goals. It would be interpreted as a boycott—and if the new regime was already inclined toward a “radical,” ideological agenda, this would be enough to push existing suspicion and caution toward open hostility. That is, of course, precisely what happened when the Ba‘th came to power.

The Ba‘thist Revolution

The Syrian army, headed by a National Council of the Revolutionary Command, overthrew the Kuzbari government and assumed power on March 8, 1963. This new group appeared to have wider support and was less isolated than those responsible for previous coups in the country.⁶⁸ The new regime was dominated by Ba‘thists, while the numbers were completed by neutralists and military officials. The key Ba‘thist Salah al-Din Bitar became the prime minister and foreign minister. Describing him as a “moderate socialist and ardent pan-Arabist,” the United States was at first hopeful that there could be positive relations.⁶⁹ US optimism was formed on the basis that the new regime declared itself as anticommunist; this time, the United States was more patient in judgment and did not at this stage see Syria’s Ba‘thist commitment to Arab nationalism as a threat. Even recognition that it was anti-Zionist did not spark greater fears; indeed, the United States predicted Syria would now “seek friendly relations with the West on a basis of non-alignment.”⁷⁰ The United States misread the extent of Syrian opposition toward Israel, and that this was indeed the

main driving force of Baʿthist Arab nationalism and the cornerstone of its anti-westernism.⁷¹

However, as Syrian-Israeli tensions flared up again on August 20, 1963, once again on the Lake Tiberias border, the extent of Syrian opposition toward Zionism dawned on the United States. Moreover, the caution exercised by the previous Syrian regime was cast aside—indeed, the new Baʿthist regime had not even sought recognition from, or relations with, the West, a clear and deliberate show of independence from western opinion. In turn, and in contrast to its earlier policy, the United States gave Israel its unreserved support, while categorically blaming Syria for starting the incident “as a means of uniting people behind them . . . since Israel is the one issue that forces all Arabs to unite.”⁷² The United States encouraged the UN’s severe “censuring” of Syria on the basis that Syria was at fault, the Israelis had been reprimanded the year before, and “above all . . . to warn Syrians off before they become too rambunctious.”⁷³ US reservations over the new Baʿthist regime were further raised when it became clear that other conservative regimes in the region appeared to view the Baʿthists and their brand of Arab nationalism as posing a greater danger than Nasser.⁷⁴

Thus, a new level of suspicion and intransigence had developed on both the American and Syrian sides; this was to escalate throughout the next four years, culminating in the outbreak of the defining Arab-Israeli War in 1967. In those years, Israel was to be a central factor in US-Syrian relations.

Conclusion

Part I has identified the roots and development of Syria’s historical opposition toward US policies in the Middle East, and in turn American marginalization of Syria. Both those developments combined to produce mutual suspicion by the end of the period examined here, and contributed to the entrenchment of ideology as a political framework through which Syria managed its foreign policy.

Syria’s foreign policy after independence had been shaped by Syria’s mandatory history. It had had a significant impact on Syria’s lack of political stability, the entanglement of external issues with the domestic agenda, and its lack of representation in international diplomacy. The French and British mandates in the Middle East, and the establishment of Israel, all perceived as European, imperialist projects, set the historical context in which Syria’s ideology was formed. As a result, and given the salience of ideology for the regional situation, Syria’s foreign policy goals were imbued with an embattled Arab nationalist ideology to rid the country and the

region of imperialism. It was influenced to a large degree by popular opinion, alienated from and galvanized by unrepresentative and short-lived governments. Realization that the United States was preoccupied with its own global strategy against the Soviet Union and sought to instrumentalize the Middle East for its Cold War, rather than genuinely support Arab independence and political development, disappointed Syrian expectations. US support for Israel and their perceived dismissal of Arab demands, "imperialist" economic and defense programs through Point Four, the MEC, and CENTO, and the encouragement and instigation of clandestine regime change in 1949 and 1957, all exacerbated earlier Syrian mistrust.

The United States, for its part, was prevented from striking closer relations with Syria early on due to overbearing French control over the country during the mandate, and Syria's lack of internal political cohesion after independence. Although the United States placed little economic value on Syrian relations and did not see it as a priority, it had attempted to develop bilateral links through economic assistance, but since the purpose of such aid was to encourage regional stability and acceptance of Israel, it naturally came with conditions. Syria's rejection of all forms of US aid and refusal to meet those conditions contributed to American frustration and the view that the Syrians were singularly intransigent and inherently anti-western. Syrian neutralism was conflated with communism and Soviet "satellization," prompting alarmist, reactionary policies that lacked long-term vision—ironically these pushed Syria closer toward its Soviet ally for arms and security. What is particularly notable in this period is the US reluctance to engage in greater dialogue with Syria and a tendency to marginalize it in regional issues, viewing it as volatile and unreliable.

Apart from brief interludes of cooperation, notably under Za'im and Kuzbari, this period of US-Syrian relations represents a worsening trajectory of opposition between the two states. Although the Syrians were cautiously optimistic at the start of America's involvement in the Middle East, one might argue that they were bound to scrutinize all US policies in a critical light given their experience of colonialism, and were therefore predisposed to view the US role as negative and imperialist. Moreover, it is true that Syria, as with the other Arab states, frustrated the United States with its parochialism and apparent aversion to understanding the Middle East's position in a global context.

However, it could similarly be argued that Syria, as a weak state just emerging from foreign occupation and threatened by interference from its neighbors, was always unlikely to prioritize the global implications of its domestic or regional politics. From the Syrian perspective, if the United States wished to come out of isolation from the Middle East, it had the responsibility (and capacity) as a global superpower to rectify the

blunders of its predecessors in the region, to respect local aspirations, to approach the Arab-Israeli problem on an even-handed basis, and to familiarize itself with the deeper complexities and nuances of Arab domestic politics. An oversight of these issues might have been justified against the dangers of the Cold War, but on the other hand, the US fear and anticipation of Soviet encroachment prompted it to engage in divisive alliance building, which in fact provoked greater Soviet involvement than otherwise might have been the case.

These conflicting arguments demonstrate the extent to which interpretations widely differed on both sides, creating a stalemate in US-Syrian relations; uniquely, it was one that was predominantly based on disagreements over regional issues, rather than bilateral issues. As will be demonstrated through the following chapters, this was a trend that continued to be manifested in their future relations.

Notes

1. Shishakli often argued to the United States that he needed military aid because all Syria's existing resources were used to combat communist forces at home; rebels responsible for the overthrow of Shishakli received help from Iraq, most probably with indirect British endorsement (see Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 137–139); the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan maintained its claims to Syria as part of a unified "Fertile Crescent"; while the arrival of Nasser on the nationalist scene saw increased attempts from Egypt to dictate Syrian affairs.
2. US correspondence with Middle Eastern regimes in the period between 1943 and 1947 on a variety of regional issues including the Arab-Israeli conflict, US diplomatic missions to the area, and possibilities for a future Arab union shows the lack of Syrian representation in these discussions, and a disproportionate reliance by the United States on Saudi, Egyptian, and Iraqi consultation. See "The Near East Region," *FRUS*, 5: 1944; 8: 1945.
3. See correspondence condemning French heavy-handedness and refusal to allow complete Syrian independence: Henderson to Acting Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 8 (May 23, 1945), p. 1093 (*passim*, pp. 1034–1218).
4. Memo from Dept of State Executive Secretary, Battle to Bundy, Central Files, 783.00/9-3061, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 7 (September 30, 1961), pp. 269–270 asserted Shishakli as harbouring "alleged pro-Westernism."
5. Discussions between the US Department of State and the British Foreign Office, *FRUS*, 5 (September 21, 1950), p. 209.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Telegram from J. Keeley, minister in Syria, to US Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 5 (February 24, 1950), p. 1205. Despite this admission, the Syrian minister expressed hopes for cooperation in the economic sphere, to which the US minister noted that it was "in marked contrast to indifference and even hostility

- that Syria had heretofore shown toward our disposition to be helpful”: *ibid.*, p. 1206.
8. Keeley to Secretary of State, *FRUS*, 5 (July 19, 1950), p. 1213.
 9. For example, George McGhee stated: “Syria should devote itself to economic development and other matters more important to its national development than raking over the coals of the Palestine conflagration”: McGhee to US minister in Syria, Cavendish W. Cannon, *FRUS*, 5 (November 14, 1950), p. 1222.
 10. This was the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood exported from Egypt, “an authentic mouthpiece of the Syrian masses” according to Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 102.
 11. Statement in March 1950, quoted by Pierre Rondot, “Les États Unis devant l’Orient d’aujourd’hui”, *Orient*, no. 2, April 1957, p. 47, cited in Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 102.
 12. See UKNA File FO371/115972 for cuttings from Syrian press containing extreme denunciation of the United States and Britain.
 13. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, 103–105, quoting from newspapers *Al-Misri*, January 22, 1951, and *Ash-Sha’b*, March 13, 1951.
 14. Ba’th Manifesto, January 24, 1951: see Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 103.
 15. Montague-Pollock, Damascus, to Eden, UKNA FO371/98940 (December 20, 1951).
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
 17. Hakim’s support for the MEC and public/political opposition, outlined in telegrams, Damascus to Foreign Office, UKNA FO371/91850 (November 5–7, 1951).
 18. For example, during the elections it was widely reported that the United States was pressurizing the government to, among other things, accept Point Four aid, exclude communists from the elections, and build a Coca-Cola plant in Syria. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 184.
 19. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 185.
 20. As the minister of economy, he had already concluded an economic agreement with the Russians and had begun talks on a treaty on friendship and commerce: Telegram, Foreign Office to Damascus, May 13, 1950, UKNA FO371/82794.
 21. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 115.
 22. Note caution in Syrian press of Soviet interference in Syria’s “private affairs under the guise of defending us against Western intervention”: in Jeel Jadid and Alif Ba, sent from Damascus to Foreign Office, UKNA FO371/91850 (November 27, 1951).
 23. Avi Shlaim and Yazid Sayigh, *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 51.
 24. General Shishakli to Dulles, memo of conversation in US embassy in Syria, *FRUS*, 9 (May 16, 1953), pp. 57–58, stating: “As a result of the US elections last November there was great hope in Syria and the Arab world that there would be a new US policy to the Near East.”
 25. Reflecting his view that the United States had a greater moral responsibility toward the rest of the world, and not just itself, Dulles stated in April 1956,

- "The United States is, I suppose, the only country in the world which has foreign policies which are not primarily designed for its own aggrandizement." Comments to foreign service personnel, April 21, 1956, John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 106, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton: cited in Ashton, *Eisenhower*, p. 6.
26. Ashton, *Eisenhower*, p. 7.
 27. Saudi Arabia's world view was based on a division between Dar-al Harb (territory of war) and Dar-al Islam, which included monotheistic religions. Hence an alliance with "Christian" United States was economically, politically, and religiously encouraged, while the influence of communism (manifested, in the eyes of the Saudis, through socialism) was to be resisted.
 28. Ashton, *Eisenhower*, p. 37.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
 30. Special Intelligence Estimate, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 12 (December 14, 1956), p. 402.
 31. The Ba'ath secured their first government post on this occasion; a year later, key posts of foreign affairs and economics were given to Ba'athists, reflecting the continued rise of the Ba'ath.
 32. Interview: Salah Salim, Egyptian spokesman, to Seale, April 12, 1960: Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 212.
 33. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 234.
 34. Special Intelligence Estimate, prepared by the CIA, Intelligence agencies of State Department, the Army, Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff: *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 12 (November 29, 1956), p. 358.
 35. Allen W. Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence in NSC meeting, *FRUS*, 12 (March 3, 1955), p. 27.
 36. Progress Report on US Objectives and Policies with Respect to the Near East: *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 12 (December 22, 1956), p. 428; also see: Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 263–282.
 37. Telegram, Washington to Foreign Office, UKNA FO371/128224 (August 21, 1957).
 38. See: UKNA FO371/121732 on the issue of Israeli attacks in the demilitarized zone and Syrian complaints to the UN Security Council, 1955–1956.
 39. For a more detailed account of the incident, see Lesch, *US and Syria*.
 40. A view echoed by the British in their correspondence with Washington: Telegram from Foreign Office, UKNA FO371/128224 August 20, 1957.
 41. Notes of Rafiq 'Arif, Iraqi chief of staff, taken at the meeting with Henderson, read out in the trial of Ahmad Baban at an Iraqi military court: BBC, no. 682, October 17, 1958, cited in Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 299.
 42. National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 30-2-57, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 12 (October 8, 1957), p. 599.
 43. Lesch, *Syria and the US*, 141.
 44. Staff Study Prepared in the Department of State, *FRUS*, 1955–1957, 12 (October 30, 1957), pp. 636–637: the United States adopted a far more lenient approach toward Egypt than Syria; US policy was to "keep the present regime

- in Syria off balance and in the position of being an abnormality in the area." Also see NSC meeting, *FRUS*, 1958–1960, 12 (February 6, 1958), pp. 39–40; telegram from embassy in Egypt to State Department, *FRUS* (December 11, 1957), pp. 744–746.
45. The United States prepared themselves for "considerable repercussions which might occur throughout the Near East if Nasser's position and prestige were seriously weakened as the result of this rebellion." William B. Grant of the Executive Secretariat to Department of State, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (September 28, 1961), p. 259.
 46. Memo from Department of State Executive Secretary Battle, to Bundy, Central Files, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (September 30, 1961), pp. 269–270.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. William B. Grant of the Executive Secretariat to Department of State, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (September 28, 1961), p. 259.
 49. Memo from Robert W. Komer of NSC to President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy, *FRUS* (September 28, 1961), *Ibid.*, p. 262.
 50. Memo from Department of State Executive Secretary Battle, to Bundy, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (September 30, 1961), pp. 269–270.
 51. Memo from Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Strong), *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (November 3, 1961), p. 321.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. *Ibid.*, 323.
 54. Memo, Battle to Bundy, *FRUS*, 17 (November 16, 1961), pp. 331–338.
 55. Policy directive prepared by the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, *FRUS*, 17 (February 27, 1962), p. 495.
 56. *Ibid.*, 496.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. CIA files, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (October 5, 1961), p. 288.
 59. Memo from Grant (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (McGhee)), *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (February 24, 1962), p. 490.
 60. Telegram from Syrian embassy (Dawalibi) to the Department of State, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (February 28, 1962), p. 502.
 61. Memo of conversation: Drafted by Hamilton, *FRUS*, 1961–1962, 17 (March 21, 1962), p. 534.
 62. Telegram from US embassy in Syria to Department of State, *FRUS*, 1961–1962, 17 (March 24, 1962), pp. 543–544.
 63. *Ibid.*, p. 544.
 64. Memo from Secretary of State Rusk to Kennedy, *FRUS*, 1961–1962, 17 (March 28, 1962), p. 552.
 65. Komer's comments on Talbot's memo, cited in footnote 1, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 17 (November 3, 1961), p. 323.
 66. *Ibid.*

67. Ibid.
68. Memo from Director of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to Secretary of State Rusk, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 18 (March 8, 1963), p. 406.
69. Memo from Rusk to Kennedy, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 18 (March 10, 1963), p. 410.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Memo from Grant and Gardner (IO) to Harriman, August 22, 1963, State Department, Central Files, POL 32-1 ISR-SYR: It is worth noting the similarity between the previous flare-up (beginning with Syrian kidnapping of three Israeli civilians and killing two Israeli kibbutz workers on August 19, and culminating with Israeli fire on Syrian positions on August 20), as well the contrast in the US response.
73. Memo from R. W. Komer of National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 18 (August 22, 1963), p. 681.
74. Telegram from State Department to US embassy in Syria, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, 18 (October 19, 1963), p. 748.

Part II

Syria's Isolation and the Birth of the US-Israeli Special Relationship

This part brings into focus the centrality of Israel to the antagonistic development of US-Syrian relations. In the short period between 1967 and 1973, the regional security dynamics changed significantly—the internal balance of power had tipped heavily in Israel's favor; external patterns of relationships had also altered so that the US support for Israel was consolidated into a long-term American strategic position, while Arab dependence on the Soviet Union had begun to wane. The vulnerability that now hung over the Arab states pushed them into two opposing directions: one was to dilute their hostility toward Israel and thereby bring themselves closer to the United States in the face of its growing military and economic superiority over the USSR; the other was to continue opposing Israeli occupation of Arab lands (even without Soviet support if necessary) and to engage the United States in the region's disputes in the hope that America would apply pressure on Israel to comply with some of their demands.

The part puts forward four key arguments: first, it argues that this period has been crucial in shaping US-Syrian bilateral relations, which continue to be constituted by their relations (or lack of) with Israel. Whatever the fortunes of the US alliance with Israel, it will have an impact on its relations with Syria, and, similarly, Syria's dispute with Israel will have a significant impact on its relationship with the United States. This has been borne out by other Arab states, whose relationships with Israel have largely determined their relations with the United States, and vice versa.

Second, this part demonstrates the complex nature of security in the region, in the way it and its threats are perceived and constructed. Thus, when security is discussed in relation to both Syria and Israel, what is

traditionally taken to reflect a materialist concern needs to be widened to encompass and connect a range of issues, from military, to economic, to identity security. For Syria, the range of security concerns in this period were not disparate ones that ought to be treated separately, but were all seemingly connected by one main threat, historically the colonial threat, and thereafter Israel. European colonial activity was fed by an imperialist ideology, while Israel's territorial, political, and cultural security was embodied in Zionist ideology—Arab nationalism thus emerged as a counter-ideology and acted as both an idea and a policy that combined a perceived need to protect not just Arab cultural, but also territorial and economic security.

Third, the neorealist view that power inequalities necessarily cause weaker states to bandwagon with more powerful states is contested. This is not always the case, as seen from the example of Syria. Its policies in this period support the argument that the balance of power dynamics in a given region need to be viewed in a more nuanced way, and that weaker states can *choose* who they bandwagon with based on values and ideas, not just power and material gain—although this does place them under greater pressure from the hegemons.

Finally, as a framework for analysis, this part employs foreign policy analysis. The systemic context is taken into account by recognizing the intervention of Cold War politics and geopolitical factors. But the chapters argue that ideas act as a valuable intervening variable, while the agents responsible for adopting and operationalizing those ideas are also analyzed. Thus, the psychology and biases of leaders, their coterie of policy-makers, lobby groups, and the military and public opinion are taken into account as important constituencies and influences on foreign policy in the US-Syrian context.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War

Hafez Asad's Ascendancy in the Ba'ath Party

In the years following Syrian independence, Israel emerged as the main aggravating factor in Syria's relations with the West, particularly with the United States. It is impossible to overstate the role that Israel played in any development of US-Syrian relations. Syria's popular and political adherence to an anti-imperialist agenda, the Arab nationalist agenda, designated Israel as "the number one enemy."¹ The fear of a Zionist threat, branded as the new face of imperialism, strengthened Syria's relations with fellow neutral Arab states and its own sense of its ideological importance.² Thus, there emerged two elements to Syrian opposition toward the United States: one, it was the dominant force of the West, and as such was already tainted by Syrian perceptions and experience of western imperialism; two, as the US ambassador to Syria observed, the "universal resentment against Israel" within Syria produced a "corollary resentment against [the] US as [the] power primarily responsible for Israel's existence."³

The previous chapter already outlined the early development of Syrian mistrust as a result of US support for Israel during and after the Second World War. Alongside the impact this had on foreign policy and public opinion in Syria, one must also take into consideration the impact these developments had on the perceptions of Hafez Asad, Syria's future iron ruler. Too much can be made of the psychology and personality of leaders and how their life experiences supposedly mold their future decisions in government. Such analyses can all too often take on a deterministic hue, sidelining pragmatic and contingent decision-making that is often rooted no deeper than in the contemporariness of leadership. And yet one must also be cautious not to dismiss the significance of personal experiences altogether. Such experiences contribute to an individual's bank of contextual knowledge—after all, decisions and policies cannot be made within a vacuum of information, and even new information will be processed and

made sense of through existing knowledge and perceptions.⁴ Given Hafez Asad's 30-year rule, his prominence in the Ba'ṯh party from a young age, and the consistency of some of his strategic decisions in the region, it is imperative to consider his earlier experiences as an influential factor on Syria's future policies and the region's politics.

According to Asad himself, the seven years spent at the Latakia secondary school, where he completed his education in 1951 aged 20, played a crucial part in forming his future outlook. He stated: "My political life started then and has not been interrupted since."⁵ Hailing from the Alawi community in the mountains and confronted with the social inequalities of the town where he was schooled, Asad grew up with a strong class consciousness. The fusion of social inequality and foreign occupation directed him toward the political ideologies holding sway at the time. He joined the Ba'ṯh at 16 years of age. With the last of the French soldiers leaving on April 17, 1946, Syria became open to a more pluralist political system, with ideological parties competing to put in place their domestic agendas. For the Ba'ṯh this meant mass recruitment and socialist reform, giving the young Asad the chance to immerse himself in party activism. The fledgling building of political institutions was suddenly interrupted on November 29, 1947, when the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution to designate more than half of Palestine to the new state of Israel. As Asad himself opined, from this moment "the contest with Zionism became the major theme" of his life.⁶

Asad's growing political activism mirrored the politicization of Syria's identity and its relations with its neighbors. Moreover, the continuation of Asad's political fervor during his military career points to why the army was to become ingrained in Syrian politics, for just as Asad carried politics into military life, he, and others like him, in turn carried the military with them as they entered into politics, helping to weave Arab nationalist ideology into the fabric of political life in Syria.

Asad graduated as a pilot officer and was posted to the Syrian officer corps in the early 1950s. After the 1949 military coup, it had become accepted that the army would continue to play a key role in Syrian political life, a point that Asad understood well. With the overthrow of Shishakli and Syria's return to a party-political system, Asad wasted no opportunities to try and recruit as many of his officer colleagues to the Ba'ṯh party. When at school, Asad's main ideological battles had been against the landed class and the Muslim Brotherhood, but in the army he saw the fault lines existing mainly between the Ba'ṯh nationalists and Antun Sa'ada's pan-Syrian nationalists. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP as the party came to be known) was by now widely seen as being pro-western, anticommunist, and anti-Arab nationalist, whereas the Ba'ṯh claimed to unite the Arabs and fend off western hegemony in the region.⁷ Following the Malki

affair, in which a member of the SSNP was found guilty of assassinating a leading Baʿthist army colonel, the SSNP was purged once and for all, leaving the Baʿth as the dominant force in the military. This contributed to Syria's history of suspicion toward Syrian-centric nationalism and notions of "greater Syria" that put a Syrian national identity above a wider Arab identity. This also had implications for Asad, as the advance of his own career coincided with the rise of his party within the army, and he was singled out for promotions and special training.

Instead of heading to Britain for training, as had traditionally been the case, Asad and his colleagues were sent in 1955 to Nasser's revolutionary Egypt in a show of unity—it was at this time that notions of a union between Egypt and Syria were already being floated by their respective governments. Egypt's equipment was too poor for the training to continue; thus, Asad and his colleagues were eventually transferred to Britain. It was in this period of turmoil for Anglo-Egyptian relations that Asad was able to observe the nationalist and revolutionary fervor in Egypt and the high-handed attitude of the British Foreign Office toward the Middle East.

Another early factor that was to have an impact on Syria's later foreign policies was Asad's suspicion of the Soviet Union. Despite Syria's leftist leanings, and the development of a political affinity with the Soviet Union over the years as a counter to the United States, its Marxist internationalism was viewed as a rival to Arab nationalism, while it was still remembered that the USSR had been the first to acknowledge the state of Israel in 1948. Even though relations between the Soviet Union and Syria had improved since the death of Stalin, Asad maintained this air of caution in his later dealings with the republic. Nevertheless, the USSR's antipathy toward the West made it an invaluable ally for the Syrian regime.

Finally, an influential episode in the development of Asad's principles and perceptions was the failure of the United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt. While it had initially been hailed by the Syrians as marking the revival of pan-Arab cooperation and strength, it ultimately turned out to be a sour experience of domination by the Egyptians, who were on their own quest for regional hegemony. The founders of the Baʿth Party, Aflaq and Bitar, were deemed by many in the Baʿth, especially those in the military who had lost out in rank and political involvement as a result of the union, as having sacrificed the party without considering the Syrian people. This impacted Asad's political views on what should be the correct aims of the Baʿth, and also on the ineffectiveness of having "theorists" leading the party. While they had articulated the ideological principles and goals of the party, Aflaq and Bitar were not the best people to operationalize them. Moreover, their social standing, hailing from the middle class, meant they were perceived to be averse to the radical sentiment welling up below. The union had direct consequences for the Baʿth, for Nasser

dissolved all political parties. Akram al-Hawrani, a key player in the fortunes of the Ba‘th and Arab nationalism in Syria, gave up his ineffective position in the UAR government in disgust, and accused Nasser of wanting to accommodate Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. Hawrani rejected any pragmatic approach with the Israelis, seeing the conflict with Zionism as an existential one in which survival was at stake.

Taking their cue from such developments, Asad and his co-conspirators in the army set about clandestine operations to bring down the union. After a well-planned coup, the UAR was dissolved on September 28, 1961. Thus, a new era in Ba‘thist nationalism began, in which *practical* implementation of ideology, the primacy of the army, and challenging “imperialism” and Zionism above all else were at the forefront of the party’s agenda, taking precedence over “Arab unity” wherever it was deemed to be a hindrance. This could be seen as the first clear example in which Ba‘thist nationalism prioritized resistance to Israel over Arab unity, particularly if unity led to a compromise of the former. This marked one of the key stages of evolution of the Ba‘th party, but also in the interpretation and application of Arab nationalist ideology in Syria.

The period between the coup and the eventual Ba‘thist revolution on February 23, 1966, saw a series of counter-coups and struggles for power between Ba‘thists, Nasserites, and conservative forces. The military continued to play an integral role, entrenching itself further into the web of national politics. Asad simultaneously made his rise up the ranks of both the military and the Ba‘th. The militarist Ba‘thists concluded that to prevent the subjugation from external forces again, the military not only needed to be strong, but also sufficiently politicized in order to remain loyal to the ideological agenda of the Ba‘th from within. Given the social constituency of the rising military class and their favoring of action over “theorizing,” the “neo-Ba‘thist” revolution of 1966, as it is often termed, led to a more militarized and socialist government taking over. The effective ruler was Salah Jadid, though he appointed Nur al-Din al-Atasi as head of state, whose Sunni background would, he hoped, pacify those opposing his own leadership on the grounds that he was himself Alawi. It was under Jadid that Hafez Asad was given a position in government, appointed as defense minister. A few months later, the abilities of this new Syrian government were put to the test as it confronted the prospect of a war against Israel.

The Onset of War

When the UAR between Syria and Egypt was formed, there were many in the US State Department who believed it was much stronger compared

to Israel, claiming that their Soviet-provided weapons “outclassed” anything the Israelis had; this would partly explain why the United States, in turn, so heavily supplied Israel with arms.⁸ But this assessment was disputed by other authorities in the US State Department, who argued Nasser’s stockpiling of weapons in the UAR was “useless,” and that Israeli arms accumulation for the sake of pacifying its domestic population was not a worthwhile, nor an effective, policy for peace in the region.⁹

However, it was not entirely clear that regional peace *was* the priority for the United States; the decade of the 1960s posed a recurring dilemma for the United States—between maintaining equilibrium in the Middle East or tipping the balance of its fragile diplomacy further in favor of Israel. Moreover, a difference of opinion emerged between members of the State Department and the president’s office over how best to manage America’s two regional goals—that of garnering Arab support to fend off the USSR, and the protection of Israel. The United States was already planning to support Israel over its planned diversion of Jordanian waters to support its growing population, a hugely controversial move. The State Department recognized that to grant Israel additional military aid at this time, as it was requesting, could unnecessarily antagonize Arab forces in the region, leading to a dangerous, possibly nuclear, arms race.

Despite this, President Kennedy decided to significantly increase both economic and military aid to Israel so that during his term in office, aid to Israel totaled at \$1 bn since 1948, compared to the \$1.7 bn earmarked for all the Arab states put together;¹⁰ when President Lyndon Johnson took over in late 1963, he took this a step further by supplying specifically offensive weapons to balance what he saw as “the disproportionate arms build up on the Arab side.”¹¹ While much of the literature states that Washington did not go so far as to approve Israel’s development of a nuclear deterrent, the declassification of South African government files from this period demonstrates that Israel had already acquired the necessary technology.¹²

The border skirmishes (particularly surrounding Lake Tiberias) in the early part of the decade between Israelis and Syrians developed into direct and increasingly violent battles between both militaries. Via so-called agricultural settlements, the Israelis had begun to occupy parts of the mutually accepted demilitarized zones (DMZs), designated as neutral land since the 1948 war. While Israel gained greater control over the water and economic resources in those areas, Asad as defense minister responded by shelling the Israeli settlements.

Syria’s actions, in addition to Palestinian guerrilla raids, invited escalating Israeli “retaliations,”¹³ which were (to Syria’s frustration) accepted as legitimate self-defense and met with no action by the UN. When Syria claimed that it could not control or stop the tit-for-tat Palestinian guerrilla

raids from its borders, the United States in turn entered into the dispute with a warning that, similarly, it could not stop Israel if it chose to strike back.¹⁴ Asad felt that he was in a dilemma: if he did nothing it would have meant surrender to Israeli encroachment in the DMZs, but large-scale retaliation would, he conceded, bring about the army's defeat in the face of Israel's military superiority.¹⁵

Such increased militarization of Syrian-Israeli enmity, over an initially low-key border dispute, contributed to the escalating tensions between Israel and all the Arab states, acting as the precursor to war in June 1967. The above account demonstrates the limitation of superpower involvement in the conflict—while they potentially could have stopped the escalation, it was the regional actors who played the key roles in starting the war. It also raises question marks about the widely adopted interpretation that Syria was the main provocateur—indeed, the long-standing dispute over the DMZs, unchallenged Israeli settlers, and Israeli retaliations also contributed to rising tensions. This highlights the historiographical differences that are often lost in accounts of the 1967 war.¹⁶

The ruling figures of the key states, their personal histories, and their political biases had a significant bearing on the march to war. For Egypt, Nasser was a victim of his past glories in Suez; his inability to challenge Israel over its actions in the region, and his perceived passivity over Palestine, led people—in Egypt and elsewhere—to question his assumed leadership of the Arab nationalist struggle.

In an attempt to repair this damage, he veered further to the Left, increasing links with the USSR and even the Viet Cong to engage in empty sabre-rattling—much to the anger of the United States. In turn, the US leadership, having been willing to see him as someone worth negotiating with in the past, now saw Nasser's moves as deliberate antagonism and were happy to see him disciplined and curtailed. Lyndon Johnson was an even more pro-Israeli president than Kennedy had been before him;¹⁷ thus, Nasser's actions and bellicose rhetoric (all for show and not with intent) further alienated Washington and meant that the United States was less likely to restrain Israel in the event of war.

Israel, for its part, was far more willing to escalate the level of confrontation than the Syrians or indeed any of the leaders anticipated. Nasser's provocation was not seen as threatening, but rather as an opportunity to be exploited. The prime minister, Levi Eshkol, being far more cautious than his political peers and the Israeli public, came under pressure and finally stepped down on the eve of war, giving way to a war coalition including militarists Moshe Dayan, Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, and the even more right-wing Menachem Begin. Israel's objectives were no longer merely to hold on to the DMZs, or to teach Syria a lesson; their target was now the

defeat of Nasser and Egypt, seen as both the greater threat and the greatest prize since 1956. Beyond this, there were those who saw war as an opportunity to expand Israel's borders permanently and redraw the map.¹⁸

The scale of war hoped for by the Israelis was in direct contrast to the intentions and predictions of Damascus, which did not have the capability to engage in all-out warfare. Their only way of responding to Israel's encroachment into the DMZs had been to sponsor limited guerrilla raids—what Asad called a “people's war”¹⁹—but they had not wanted an escalation beyond the Syrian-Israeli borders. What they did not calculate was their inability to control the actions and motives of the Palestinian guerrilla movement, who saw the advantages of an all-out Arab-Israeli war for their own cause.

In the face of increased tensions between Syria and Israel, the under-fire Nasser felt compelled to demonstrate his pan-Arab credentials. He signed a defense pact first with Syria and then with Jordan, agreeing to come to their aid if they came under attack, though he had no intention to fight a war with Israel and was unprepared in the event. However, this move provided Israel with the opportunity to bring Egypt into the sphere of war and—given Israel's military superiority, assured US backing, and better preparation—to inflict a likely defeat on their old foe.

Between November 1966 and April 1967, Israel launched an invasion into the West Bank of Jordan and escalated its air battles with Syria, forcing Egypt (as Israel anticipated) to respond by moving its troops onto the Sinai border with Israel. What Egypt had intended to be a deterrence for Israel and a launch for negotiations provided Israel with the *casus belli* it was looking for to pursue a full-scale war against the Arab states in order to annex more territory and enhance its security position.²⁰ What is more, the operation was carried out with tacit and full approval from Lyndon Johnson.

In the week-long war, the Arab states endured a crushing defeat. Israel took the Egyptian Sinai, the Jordanian West Bank, and the Syrian Golan Heights. On June 5, Syria lost its air force, and on the 10th the Golan was captured; on the same day, a cease-fire was announced, yet Israel went on to capture Quneitra, the main town of the Golan, as well as Mount Herman on June 12. The latter was a strategic high point on the Golan, which the Israelis set up as an electronic listening post and from where they could “monitor every movement in the Damascus plain.”²¹ Over the course of the war, 600 Syrian soldiers were killed from continuous bombing and napalming; the town of Quneitra was utterly destroyed, becoming a symbol of Syria's sense of injustice, while its inhabitants and those from surrounding areas were forced to flee, leaving some 120,000 displaced Syrians.²²

The significance of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War for the region as a whole, its causes, and its consequences have been analyzed in great depth elsewhere and need not be revisited in further detail here.²³ It is sufficient to emphasize that the outcome of the war was militarily and politically disastrous for the Arab states and had a grave psychological impact: suddenly their Arab nationalist identity and its capacity to unite the Arabs was called into serious question. This was accompanied by the realization that Israel, with its small population and all its vulnerabilities, had surpassed all the Arab states in its military power and tactical awareness. The war was a pivotal event in consolidating Israel's statehood and stake in the region, as well as an asymmetrical military and economic situation. It also served to stamp US dominance in the region as the patron of the victors versus the USSR.

Beyond its general impact on Arab morale, the war had a particular, constitutive part to play in the future triangular political dynamics between the United States, Syria, and Israel. It also contributed to strategic introspection within both the Syrian and American governments. First at a domestic level, the failures of the Syrian army, the humiliating loss of the strategically vital Golan Heights, the destruction of the civilian town of Quneitra by the Israeli army after the official cease-fire, and the roles played by both external and regional actors provoked in Damascus self-criticism and a deeper mistrust of enemies and allies alike. The strategic wisdom of Salah Jadid's government's militaristic approach, not just in the war, but prior to it, was now scrutinized more openly—militarism had become a part of the Ba'athist revolutionary ideology in the 1950s and 1960s, but should it be adopted to the point of jeopardizing Syrian and Arab interests?

This was an observation not lost on Hafez Asad, who himself carried the guilt of overseeing the air force and its failures. Such a humiliating defeat could not be repeated, and change at the top of the regime—not just in personnel but also in strategy—was coming to be viewed as a matter of urgency, setting in train intensified rivalry within the leadership and a debate about the future of Syria's political approach. Second, the war did not just generate introspection and have a negative effect on Syria's morale; it also had a major influence on Asad's personal, long-term perceptions of the United States as the bankroller of Israel, and the Soviet Union's unreliability as a key ally. Thus, the need for a more strategically competent, less reactionary, and more pragmatic government was simultaneously tied to *deepening* hostility and mistrust toward the United States, not the opposite.

The sense of international law being violated with impunity—for example, Israel's unilateral invasion of Arab territories, the sacking of Quneitra even after the declaration of a cease-fire, and the occupation of seized land through civilian settlements, which permanently displaced those

Arab communities evacuated during the war—provoked Syrian anger and charges of double standards. It also meant the ensuing American proposals for peace were treated with disdain by the Syrians, mirroring what they felt was Israeli disdain for UN laws safeguarding Arab security.

Aftermath of the War

In the months following the outbreak of the 1967 war, the United Nations issued Security Council Resolution 242 on November 22. The text of the resolution emphasized the “inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war” and the need to work for a “just and lasting peace in which every state in the area can live in security.” It stipulated that all states should act in accordance with Article 2 of the UN Charter. Crucially, it laid down two principles, with implications for both Israel and the Arab states. The first of these was “the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in recent conflict.” The second was “The termination of all claims or states of belligerence and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force.” In addition to these principles, the resolution also affirmed the following:

- 1) The guarantee of free navigation (for all states) through international waterways in the area
- 2) A guarantee for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem
- 3) A guarantee of territorial inviolability and political independence of every state in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones

Resolution 242 was supposed to set the basic goals and parameters of a possible peace settlement. But efforts to move the parties concerned toward that settlement required more than the rhetoric of a UN resolution; for it carried no condemnation, apportioned no responsibility, nor conveyed a clear timeline or potential sanctions that might have induced greater urgency among the states involved. Amid a continuing war of attrition, the United States attempted (and largely failed) to secure cease-fires through an initiative set up by Secretary of State William Rogers (known as the “Rogers Plan”), and sent Ambassador Jarring on a diplomatic mission to sell the prospect of peace negotiations to the Arab states. For the Syrians, the resolution did not go far enough to force Israel’s withdrawal from Arab territories; furthermore, it appeared to equate the urgency of Israeli

withdrawal with a reciprocal diplomatic recognition of Israel on the part of Arab states—given that Syria at this stage contested not only Israel's borders but what it saw as Israel's illegitimate occupying status, it could not accept such a proposition. In protest at the resolution's perceived leniency toward Israel and disregard for the refugee problem, which long predated the 1967 war, as well as in protest at America's contribution to Israel's victory, Syria refused to accept Resolution 242 or to receive Ambassador Jarring in the country.

Beyond this, the United States also enacted its own policies independent of the UN to address the region's volatility in the aftermath of war. It imposed a complete embargo on the sale of items that could be of military significance to the Arab states and Israel. Despite their attempts and requests to restart trade, the embargo remained firmly in place toward Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and was enacted most consistently against the Syrians. In contrast, the embargo was soon lifted for Israel. Officially, the United States justified their contradictory actions by arguing they had "diplomatic relations" with the Israelis, whereas they did not with the Arab states.²⁴ The United States further argued that since the Soviet Union did not exercise any restraint in its military sales to the area (i.e., to Arab states), it felt compelled to similarly reassess its own policy.²⁵ In this way, the policy was portrayed as an attempt to restore military parity in the region, even though US weapons were far superior to those of the Soviet Union.

It was an argument ill received by the Arabs; when, in 1968, Washington agreed to the sale of 50 F-4 Phantom supersonic jet aircrafts to Israel worth a total value of \$200 m in order to boost Israel's defense, it was severely criticized by the Arab states, which was then manifested among the Arab public with street protests against the United States and western personnel.²⁶ The United States also breached the embargo by supplying weapons to Jordan to prevent it from turning to the Soviet Union; this effectively polarized the region even more than before, between allies of the United States and allies of the Soviet Union.

It was during this period of existing tension that matters were made worse by the Syrian hijacking of a US plane. One of the first jobs of the newly elected president, Robert Nixon,²⁷ was to condemn the hijacking and order the extradition of the perpetrators. Immediately then, prospects for US-Syrian rapprochement and thereby a smoother path toward peace negotiations appeared dim.

While the issues of weapons sales and terrorism rumbled on, the potential peace settlement was still on the table but faced several problems. Resolution 242 had in fact done no more than symbolize the deadlock that now existed between the Arabs and Israel—the Arabs interpreted it

as demanding Israel's complete withdrawal behind the 1967 borders prior to negotiation, whereas Israel saw it as a demand for the recognition of Israeli sovereignty and security before any return of land.²⁸

In the face of this deadlock, the United States became preoccupied with the Jordanian and Egyptian sides of the settlement, viewing Jordan as "the most ready" to accept Israel as a neighbor, and Egypt as having "earned the right to make peace" through its size and importance in the region.²⁹ In contrast, the United States stated that its main reason for "ignoring Syria has been the Syrian government's refusal to accept the principle of a peaceful settlement." The Syrians' unwillingness to endorse UN Resolution 242, to hand over militants, or to allow US Ambassador Jarring to enter the region showed them to be "typically intransigent" in America's view, and justified their policy of nonengagement with Syria's grievances.³⁰ The Syrians, for their part, felt non-cooperation was the only means by which they were able to voice their condemnation and anger at the occupation of Arab lands and the perceived waiving of Israeli culpability by the United States.

America's silence over Syria's situation (its loss of land, large numbers of military casualties, displacement of its people) further deepened the mistrust felt toward the United States and aggravated its enmity toward Israel. The United States, however, remained confident about its policy, basing it on an assessment that at that moment there was "virtually no chance"³¹ of a Syrian-Israeli settlement, at least not before Israel had settled with Jordan and Egypt. Not only was it deemed logical, but it also allowed the United States the opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation versus the consequences of obstructionism, making an example of Syria and its noncompliance.

Thus, 1969 saw the emergence of the policy of "separate peace," one that would have lasting consequences for Syria, for its relations with the United States, and indeed for the wider region. It is true that the Syrians had framed the logics of this plan by refusing to accept UN Resolution 242, unlike its Arab neighbors. Their intention had been to pressurize its neighbors to follow suit and form a united Arab front, one that would be stronger against Israel and in negotiations with the United States; moreover, the refusal to accept 242 was designed to act as a message of defiance and intolerance for the continued occupation of Arab land, contravening, as the Syrians saw it, international law. However, Washington determined that "problematic" Arab states should no longer be allowed to influence its own agenda for the region, and thus instigated the policy of separate paths to peace—a policy that the Syrians were always to view as a deliberate move to irrevocably divide the Arabs and deny justice to both Syrians and Palestinians.³²

Nevertheless, despite leaving the Syrians out in the cold, the United States outlined a potential incentivizing plan in the event that Syria would eventually come round and accept the necessity of negotiating with Israel. The preconditions for a Syrian-Israeli settlement³³ included the following:

1. All parties would agree on a timetable for action.
2. The state of war and belligerency would be terminated and a formal state of peace established.
3. Parties would agree on a secure and recognized boundary between them.
4. Parties would work out an agreement on demilitarized zones.
5. Refugees from the 1948 war would be offered compensation or repatriation.
6. Syria and Israel would mutually agree to respect and acknowledge each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability, and political independence.
7. The final accord would be recorded and signed by parties and held by the UN.

In public, the Americans put the onus for further peace talks on the Syrians, with the implication being that they only had themselves to blame for the lack of progress on the Syrian-Israeli front. But in private they also acknowledged that as long as Israel retained the right to annex the Golan Heights, there would always be seeds for ongoing conflict in the Middle East.³⁴ Officially, Israel cited security reasons to justify annexation, so, in response, the United States sought a compromise by allowing Israel to retain a thin strip of territory along the crest overlooking the Jordan River (but not overlooking Lake Tiberias), thus assuring security for Israel's Hula Valley.³⁵ However, despite such overt attempts to reach a compromise, the United States had privately conceded from an early stage of proceedings that

The Israelis will not withdraw from [the] Golan Heights no matter what is decided by the great powers in this regard. If worst comes to worst, the Israelis are prepared to confront even the United States should the United States attempt to force the Israelis to pull back.³⁶

Israel was keen to point out that the assurance of security was not enough, for their claim to the Golan Heights was not based merely on security but also on history and moral right. Israeli diplomat Ben-Aharon reiterated the nonnegotiable conditions of Israel's annexation by stating that the United States must "realize the depth of feeling in Israel about [the]

retention of the Golan Heights.”³⁷ This forces a reassessment of the notion publicly promulgated by the United States at the time, that Syria alone was the intransigent factor in any proposed peace settlement. Given its private statements to the United States about its implacability on the issue, the notion that Israel was a passive actor merely waiting for the Arabs to accept universally accepted peace conditions is not viable with the documentary evidence. Rather, Israel’s predetermined and immovable position on what the outcome of any settlement should be (including permanent rights for Israel to annex the Golan Heights) contributed to the existing stalemate between Syria and Israel.

Other Arab states, Egypt and Jordan, did not experience the same deadlock in their negotiations because they accepted Israeli conditions, almost fully and with few demands of their own. Noticeably in the State Department records, the Israelis were not questioned in their commitment to peace or asked to compromise as the Syrians were, not in private and never in public. The purpose of negotiations on the Syrian-Israeli front, from the American standpoint, was mainly to persuade the Syrians to accept the Israeli position, rather than to produce movement and bargaining from both sides.

Emergence of the American-Israeli “Special Relationship”

The question arises, why did the United States make such little attempt to move the Israelis from their own position of intransigence, while simultaneously berating the Syrians for theirs? What bonds of loyalty or identity, what strategic or economic necessities, or what domestic political influences bound the United States so closely to Israel and generated such a strong inclination to pursue Israeli interests on Israel’s behalf? The United States pursued this policy under Roosevelt and Truman, to a lesser extent under Eisenhower, and with increased vigor under Kennedy. This trend was continued and raised to greater levels under President Lyndon Johnson, and the partiality became particularly marked during the 1967 war. When Nixon became president in 1969, he sought to temper the appearance of overt bias that Johnson had fostered,³⁸ but by that stage the US-Israeli “special relationship” was already a fixture of US foreign policy. It had evolved into something deeper than pure strategic interests and was a virtually unshakeable commitment.

The 1967 war and the alarming rapidity with which the United States and the Soviet Union were dragged into a regional conflict, creating the danger of a direct confrontation between the two superpowers, forced a reassessment of US strategy in the Middle East. The United States could

not protect Israeli interests while at the same time seeking to strengthen the Arabs as a bulwark against communism, if they were both likely to be in conflict with each other. Moreover, Israel's military victory and superiority in the 1967 war meant it was no longer possible to play to international sympathy and a (now-outdated) moral justification by claiming to support the "underdog" in the region. The State Department drafted a paper named "US Policy in the Middle East" in the summer of 1968, which eloquently illuminated the nature of Washington's dilemma:

... Israel cannot be described merely as a "disturbing factor" in our relations with the Arab world—Israel and the nature of our relationship with it is a basic obstacle to our achieving better relations and exerting greater influence throughout the area. In a sense we are caught within a dilemma. On the one hand, we feel constrained to maintain a special association with Israel, while on the other, we seek to safeguard our interests in the Arab world which are being eroded because of our special relationship with Israel. The weakness of our position ... is that we are trying to achieve both objectives, although they are incompatible.

It would be helpful if we were to recognize the difficulty in which we find ourselves and analyze the reasons for our special relationship with Israel and failure to achieve our goals in the area. Then, and only then, could we begin to approach the area and its problems with a greater degree of realism.

We have developed [a] special relationship with Israel for very valid reasons. But they are reasons not germane to Middle Eastern dynamics. They are associated, rather, with political factors at work elsewhere around the world, most particularly in the United States and in Western Europe. We should also recognize that Israel itself holds the key to none of our interests in the area: it is not an effective deterrent to the spread of Communism nor an effective instrument for strengthening western influence there; it controls no significant amount of petroleum; it is not a factor in communications or transit facilities; and, by itself, it cannot bring about peaceful conditions. On the other hand, the Eastern Arab states do hold the key to our basic policy objectives, with the one exception of the one envisioning a peaceful resolution of area problems. This last one is attainable only through Arab-Israel cooperation.³⁹

The paper went on to outline two alternative policy routes. One was to "*maintain a low level of involvement in the internal and regional politics of the Middle East*" (emphasis added), since the authors of the paper deemed that taking on even greater responsibility in the region would require the United States to play a far more decisive role; this would not be possible "without alienating one or the other of the contending parties, or both." However, it was also acknowledged that if the United States chose to remain aloof from the hostile situation in the Middle East and did not weigh in

heavily with the parties, “the Arab-Israel conflict will remain smouldering and will break out from time to time in open warfare,” while US Cold War interests would be continuously weakened. Thus, the second route, and the one that the policy paper ultimately recommended, required the United States *to make a serious commitment to one of two possible, and probably divisive, resolutions*, these being “a) an end to Arab irredentism or b) a decision on the part of the Israelis not to seek their destiny as a nation apart from the Arab community in which they are located.” It was agreed that both options would generate resentment and opposition on either side of the conflict. If the United States were to pursue such a policy, then it would have to be prepared to abandon the appearance of trying to placate both the Arabs and the Israelis—though there were many that already felt the US handling of both sides was far from equitable.

From the introspective tone of the paper, one might at first assume that the United States was set to reassess its close relations with Israel and that, on the balance of US geopolitical interests, the United States would give its support to the Arab states. However, to the contrary, Washington opted to give its unreserved support to Israel after this policy paper was issued—a policy that reflected the president’s office and the view of the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. From here on, Washington saw Israel no longer as an isolated outpost of US interests in the region, but as a state that could also help the United States fulfill its strategic goals in the region, an accolade that had traditionally been bestowed upon the Arabs.⁴⁰ And thus, rather than pursuing incompatible goals, two key strategies were twinned, so that the United States was now on course to focus its efforts on aiding the Israelis and further boosting their military capability and strength in the region.

As intimated in the policy paper, the key reasons for US support for Israel had not historically been strategic or geopolitical. Rather, it was an emotional connection felt toward Jews as a result of the Holocaust, and personal ties to Jewish ancestry and identity among several members of the US administration, that had fostered close US-Israeli relations. Moreover, there was a large Jewish community living in the United States whose voice carried more weight than that of Arabs living in another continent. When domestic politics became fraught, successive US administrations increasingly approached Middle Eastern affairs against the background of needing the support of the pro-Israeli lobby.⁴¹ Short-term political pragmatism at home played as much a part in Washington’s decision to support Israel as the emotional ties of some US politicians.

Nixon’s initial aim to establish a *détente* between all parties was essentially discarded by this new policy, but it did reflect pragmatism to the extent that any type of peace—even an incomplete one, or an unjust one in the view of the Arabs—was deemed acceptable if it was in US interests.

As for supporting Israel, this was a policy that had already been in motion under Johnson and Kennedy before him, but after this internal debate it was now accompanied with a strategic rationale as well.

Notes

1. Telegram 435, Damascus to Washington, February 24, 1954, Sabri al-Asali (Syria National Party) Ministerial Statement rejecting the Baghdad Pact, cited in *FRUS*, XIII, p. 515.
2. Syria recognized that close alliances were needed in the event of war with Israel: Telegram 465, March 8, 1954, Prime Minister Asali to James Moose on *FRUS*, XIII (March 5, 1954), explaining Syria's siding with Egypt and opposition to the Baghdad Pact, p. 519.
3. Moose, US ambassador to Syria, to Washington, *FRUS*, XIII (May 7, 1955), p. 525.
4. Robert Jervis, "Leadership, Post-Cold War Politics, and Psychology," *Political Psychology*, 15 (4) (December 1994), pp. 769–777.
5. Hafez Asad, interview with Patrick Seale, Damascus, October 1984. Cited in Seale, *Asad of Syria, The Struggle for the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 1988), p. 26.
6. Hafez Asad, interview with Seale, Damascus, May 1985. Cited in Seale, *Asad*, p. 35.
7. Seale, *Asad*, p. 50.
8. Memo of conversation, Phillips Talbot in Washington, *FRUS*, XVIII, 1964–1967 (January 3, 1964).
9. Robert Komer to Washington, *FRUS*, XVIII, 1964–1967 (January 10, 1964), pp. 11–14.
10. Kennedy, cited in Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel, from War to Peacemaking* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 86.
11. Johnson, cited in Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel*, p. 86.
12. *Guardian*, "Revealed: How Israel Offered to Sell South Africa Nuclear Weapons," May 24, 2010. For statements on previous uncertainty about Israeli nuclear weapons, see: David Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict—A History* (OUP, 2008), 199–200.
13. See: Janice Terry, *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups* (Pluto Press, 2005), which outlines that the word "retaliation" has become politically loaded to imply that there is culpability of aggression on one side (the Arabs), and self-defense on the other (the Israelis).
14. Memo, Houghton to Battle, May 15, 1967 (US State Department Records, National Archives, Maryland, hereafter referred to as SD), Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D490, Record Group 59, Box 8.
15. Seale, *Asad*, p. 120.
16. The history of the war is contested among scholars: Shalev (1994: 50) and Daniel Pipes argue that the Arabs held greatest responsibility for the war through radicalization and deliberate provocations; Shlaim and Seale argue

that Israel were already looking for a *casus belli* to strike Egypt and expand territorially; Itamar Rabinovich settles for a cycle of escalation from both sides, with neither side seeking war: *The Brink of Peace, the Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* (Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 19–23.

17. Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel*, pp. 86.
18. Seale, *Asad*, pp. 128.
19. *Ibid.*, 191–120.
20. *Ibid.*, 132.
21. *Ibid.*, 142.
22. *Ibid.*, 140–141.
23. For accounts of the 1967 war, see: Seale, *Asad*, 117–141; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall—Israel and the Arab World* (Norton, 2001), 236–250; Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel*; Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 204–214.
24. Memo, Sisco to Secretary of State, January 21, 1974, SD File: Strategic Trade Control, Syria 1973. DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
25. Statement on situation in ME, Torbert to Gude, November 10, 1969, SD Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D4, RG 59, Box 6.
26. Memo of conversation, Davies, Scotese, and Jordanian ambassador, August 27, 1969, SD Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D4, Record Group 59, Box 6.
27. Nixon replaced the Johnson administration in January 1969.
28. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), pp. 198–199.
29. *Ibid.*, 199.
30. Draft US position on Israeli-Syrian settlement, Baas to Roger Davies, December 18, 1969, SD Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D4, Record Group 59, Box 6.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Author's interview with Martha Kessler (Washington, DC, May 2009).
33. See: Draft US position on Israeli-Syrian settlement, Baas to Roger Davies, December 18, 1969, SD Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D4, Record Group 59, Box 6.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Memo of conversation, Aharon, Scotese, October 17, 1969, SD Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D4, Record Group 59, Box 6.
38. Rabil, *Syria, the US*, 46.
39. Comments on "US Policy in the Middle East," File: Pol-23, Arab/Israel, July–December 1968, SD Entry A1 (5624) Lots #71D5, #71D22, Record Group 59, Box 3.
40. Rabil, *Syria, the US*, p. 47.
41. R. Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, p. 121.

Syria's Postwar Position and Policy toward the United States

Hostile Relations

Washington's postwar policy and increasing inclination toward Israel provoked an increasingly hostile policy from Syria. Between 1967 and 1970, the Syrians saw no signs of progress for the recovery of the occupied Golan Heights or Palestinian territories or parity in the balance of power in the region. As a result, the Syrians harbored the following grievances against the United States for (as they saw it) failing to consider Arab aspirations and interests:

- i. Disproportionate US support for Israel in the 1967 war
- ii. A US-enforced embargo on arms trade with the Arab states
- iii. US policy shift stipulating withdrawal from occupied land as being conditional on peace (*contra* international law)
- iv. US failure to condemn continued Israeli settlements in occupied territories
- v. Perceived US exploitation of cleavages amid the Arab ranks
- vi. Suspected US espionage for Israel

The first grievance was of course the United States' strengthened alliance with Israel. In contrast, the Arabs enacted a boycott against Israel straight after the war, led by Syria, whom Washington labeled ignominiously as "the most rabid of the Arab countries on this subject."¹

The United States noted from the Ba'ath's early foreign policy that it was not only the "most belligerent of all the Arab states toward Israel," but its preoccupation with Israel had "dominated Syria's foreign policy" and, as a result, it tended to "shape its policy toward a given nation in terms of

that nation's policy toward Israel."² Even prior to the June 1967 war, Syria had viewed anything American with "profound suspicion." As the United States correctly asserted, the "basic issue is the Palestinian problem and the total identification, in Syrian eyes, of the United States with Israel."³ After the war, Syria's animosity and association of the United States with Israel only increased. The Syrian government severed relations with the United States with immediate effect, giving American official personnel only 48 hours to leave, whose lives, according to US reports, had been in grave danger while they remained in Syria. Although other Arab states, such as Iraq, Algeria, and Egypt, had also broken official relations with the United States in protest after the war, they still maintained diplomatic links by retaining personnel in their respective interests sections in Washington. Syria's severance, however, was "total." The furthest the Syrian government went was to assign a clerk to the Syrian interests section of the Pakistan embassy in Washington, DC, Syria's protecting power in the United States, while Italian officials had to represent the United States in Damascus.

Moreover, the United States continuously came under severe attacks in the Syrian press, and visas were refused to American tourists. Things did not improve in 1968 when the United States noted that "the prospects for resuming relations with Syria are even bleaker than those of Iraq," with whom the United States also had frosty relations since its own Ba'athist revolution.⁴ According to the State Department, the United States had, up until 1972, very few direct contacts with Syrian officials from 1967 onward.⁵ An internal report on foreign trade in the Middle East further elaborated on the extent of poor relations between the United States and Syria:

To date, the Syrians have continued to be extremely hostile to the US and their public information media have castigated the US to a degree which even exceeds the hostile Peking propaganda. Furthermore the Syrian Government has boycotted American goods and has favoured the goods of other countries. The SARG has attempted to undermine the pro-Western governments in Jordan and Lebanon by means of sending fedayeen through Lebanese and Jordanian territory. This has invited Israeli retaliation which has contributed to the internal instability of these countries. Thus we do not want to do anything that would enhance the military capabilities of either the fedayeen or the Syrian Army.⁶

The second main grievance, apart from Washington's general support for Israel, was Syria's frustration at the US-imposed embargo on the sale of weapons to Arab states. Damascus saw this as a deliberate attempt to prevent the Arabs from developing not just their militaries but also their general domestic security infrastructure; even the import of police radios

was vetoed by the United States. Against this backdrop, the Syrians were especially vexed by a continued American supply of arms and fighter jets to Israel, while their own military stockpiles deteriorated.⁷ Indeed, the United States had become the major source of arms for Israel,⁸ which were used directly against Palestinian and Syrian fedayeen—deemed by the United States and Israel as terrorists, but by the Syrians as an important part of a legitimate resistance.

The third grievance, and most grating for the Syrians, was Washington's ambivalence toward Israel's refusal to withdraw from Syrian (and other Arab) lands. The Israeli ambassador to the United States reflected his government's position regarding settlements on the Golan Heights, stating that he

saw no reason why Israel should not do what it wished to fulfil its responsibility for maintaining the territories under its control so long as Israel acted within the context of military occupation and abided by the Geneva Convention.⁹

Thus, it was apparent that the Israelis did not perceive any need or pressure to withdraw from the Golan Heights, despite the illegality of settlement construction under international law. Furthermore, they made it clear they had no intent to do so in the future by continuing to build settlements. In 1968, the Jewish Agency announced plans to settle a further 15,000 civilians on the Golan Heights. Initially, the United States did express disapproval, pointing out that the mentioned settlements "would . . . be in violation of the Convention," citing Article 49, paragraph 6, of the 1949 Geneva Convention pertaining to civilians, which stipulated, "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."¹⁰ The ICRC commentary¹¹ provided on the convention indicated that this clause was intended to prevent the *colonization* of occupied territories in the aftermath of war. As an official at the US State Department highlighted, the clause was inserted to prevent practices similar to those adopted by Nazi Germany during the Second World War, when it had transferred portions of its own population to occupied territories for political and racial reasons; thus, he argued, Israel was "pursuing a policy with regard to settlements on the Golan Heights which is inconsistent with the intent of Article 49(6)."¹² There ensued as a result of his comments some dispute within the State Department about the extent to which the article in question prohibited *any* settlement on occupied areas, but there was no doubt that it clearly prohibited *colonization*, which, it was agreed, would occur if the number of settlers was substantial and for the long term. However, this internal debate and

uncertainty was not made public, and it was clear no action would be taken over it.

There was thus an unusual situation in which Washington clearly acknowledged that continued Israeli occupation of Arab land and subsequent building of settlements was illegal under international law, but, at the same time, it refused to put any pressure on Israel to withdraw following its strategic policy shift to defend Israel at the expense of the Arabs. Instead of focusing on the repatriation of refugees and demanding Israeli withdrawal from land occupied during the war, the United States enabled this situation to be framed as the status quo. This then put the onus on the Arab states to recognize and strike peace with Israel *in return for land*. Prior to this, the return of lands seized in conflict was assumed as an unconditional stipulation under international law; as Henry Kissinger elucidated in his memoirs, it was the United States that altered this international norm after its significant policy change in favor of Israel.¹³

With Israel continuing to build settlements, and with Washington effectively defending Israel's actions, the Syrians now believed that it had both the moral and legal argument on its side, that it was within their rights to recover their lost lands without the conditions that Israel and the United States had placed on them. As a result, Syria also became, over time, a champion of the UN as the legal framework within which to operate and pointed the blame at the United States for operating outside of it.¹⁴ The legal route became a reflection of a moral argument for the Syrians, while international law—on this issue at least—was treated as an ally against the collusion of the United States and Israel, viewed by Damascus as the real transgressors.

The Syrians also saw the United States as deliberately using postwar Arab disillusionment, and its own superpower influence, to sow disunity among the Arab states. On one hand, the United States observed that the war had united some Arab forces with the effect of “downplaying the conflict between nationalism and Islam,”¹⁵ but on the other hand, it had also set some regimes apart from others, producing cleavages within the collective Arab policy that could then be exploited by the United States and Israel to initiate peace among *some* of the Arab states, if not all.

Jordan was marked as one of those countries; for unlike Syria, Jordan was not motivated by ideology, but regime security. As the State Department observed, in contrast to Syria:

King Husayn's main preoccupation is the preservation of the monarchy for the Hashimite dynasty. If he could do it by accepting Israel's existence he probably would do so, but he is inhibited from doing so by the pressure of Palestinians in Jordan and his revolutionary Arab rivals.¹⁶

Hence, Jordan opposed Israel on an instrumental basis, for domestic factors and not out of any moral or ideological principle; recognizing this weakness in the collective Arab front, Washington put its efforts into dealing with the Arab parties separately to sway their policies away from an Arab nationalist course.

It was not the case that there were no efforts on either the American or Syrian side to improve relations. Indeed, at one point, Egypt's decision to raise US representation in Egypt to ambassadorial rank did stimulate Damascus to also bridge the divide. Moreover, Washington still saw some benefits in maintaining modest relations with Damascus—the “maximum extent permitted by the Syrians”—which they hoped would include commercial and cultural activities on a par with other countries. In view of both geopolitical considerations and its potential in economic and human resources, Syria was deemed by the United States to be too important to ignore, much less “give up,” and through some degree of normalization of relations in nonpolitical fields, the United States sought to have rights to transit oil through Syria and to fly its aircraft over Syrian airspace. The Americans acknowledged that while they could not hope to change Syrian attitudes toward Israel, and thereby the United States, they could help develop Syria into a “modern nation,” which would accrue subsidiary benefits for US economic and commercial interests in the region.¹⁷

However, these intentions failed to materialize. As the State Department correctly asserted, regardless of these nonpolitical gestures, the “main impetus for improvement of relations with the United States is forward movement on a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.”¹⁸ The Syrians held deep mistrust and anger toward the United States, and the latter failed to calculate that its economic and cultural activities would also be viewed in a suspicious light. Thus, Syria engaged in a number of acts to further widen the diplomatic gulf between the two states. In 1969, two Israeli passengers were detained in Syria following the hijacking of a TWA airliner on August 29, 1969. This became a matter of “profound concern to the United States Government.” Damascus had expressed it was willing to reconsider releasing the two Israelis in exchange for two Syrian military pilots held by Israel since 1968, whose planes had strayed over Israeli territory on a training mission and made an emergency landing on Israeli territory. However, the Israelis had publicly rejected any suggestion of such an exchange.¹⁹ In addition to this, the Syrians had detained several US citizens suspected of espionage for Israel. As was accurately observed:

This, in fact, has been the general rule of our efforts to improve relations with Syria. Every time our contacts seem about to reach a conclusion, an

incident has occurred between Syria and Israel, or on another front of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which sets us back to our original starting point.²⁰

The Syrians sought to communicate these various grievances to the Americans, and it only exacerbated the hostility and divisions when Washington dismissed Syrian anger as “xenophobia.”²¹ The notion that Syria’s grievances were a result of irrational hatred of the United States, rather than its policies, served to undermine Syria’s political claims—this in turn enabled the United States to sideline Syria, while Syrian opposition rather than being taken seriously was perceived as emotional and reactionary.

Syria’s Marginalization and the Advent of a New Regime

The above analyzes relations between Damascus and Washington, but it is also important to consider simultaneous developments at both the regional and domestic levels to understand state behavior and changes taking place at the bilateral level. In Syria’s case, this is particularly important; more so than most states, Syria’s policies at three different levels—international, regional, and domestic—have been interrelated.²²

In the United States, foreign policy, as in many democracies at this time, remained primarily a concern of the political elites and interested lobby groups, while the domestic agenda dominated popular political discourse. In Syria, however, foreign policy was intertwined with domestic politics. Given that it found itself on a constant war footing against Israel, foreign policy was not merely a preserve of the elites but was in the consciousness of many ordinary Syrians. It was not only victory against an enemy such as Israel that mattered; the principle of “standing up” to the Americans and showing solidarity with the Palestinians and fellow Arabs was not only valued but demanded, even in the absence of success. This is alluded to regularly in primary documents, highlighting the Syrian *public*, more so than in other Arab states, as hostile to the United States and increasingly vocal and frequent in their protests. Syria’s foreign policy was thus pursued not only in the hope of attaining material and military advantage, but on ideational factors—captured within Arab nationalist ideology, though not constrained to those who called themselves nationalists or Ba‘thists. The principles of anti-imperialism and opposing occupation were broad enough to attract the strong support of average members of the public, regardless of the political machinations of the party elite and controversies over domestic policies.

Thus, while the Syrian government was at this time weak and unstable, facing both international and internal party pressures, it was supported by

the people on its stance against Israel. In a report from Dr. Luigi Conte, the Italian officer in charge of American interests in Damascus, it was claimed that the government enjoyed a great deal of popularity. He suggested that Syria was the first Arab country to undergo a "real proletarian revolution," and argued that the grassroots popularity and degree of control of the regime in Syria were perhaps underestimated.²³

The full reality was of course impossible to measure, but even with such support, the government was facing growing opposition from various quarters by 1970. Defeat against Israel had been a humiliating episode and increased criticism against the regime. There were those in Syrian society who had significant reservations against the Ba'ṯist revolution to begin with, despite its popular stance against Israel, among them the urban merchant class and Islamist groups. Moreover, deep rifts also existed within the Ba'ṯ party itself, which had not been resolved by the radicalist purges of 1966. Some in the party dissenting against the Jadid regime found a rallying point in Salah Bitar, once a Ba'ṯist, now outside of the sphere of the regime. Others such as Akram Hawrani and Amin al-Hafez were identified by Washington as being distrustful of the United States but also opposed to the current Syrian regime. They were marked out as potential agitators, and in such an event, Washington sought to keep channels open, should they want to contact the United States with a view to changing the Syrian regime.²⁴

The lack of experience and indeed incompetence among a number of those whom Jadid had put in key positions added to the weakness of government and its inability to defeat Israel: these included Yusuf Zu'ayyin as prime minister, Ibrahim Makhous as foreign minister, and Nur al-Din al-Atassi as head of state. Sectarian divisions were also becoming more apparent under Jadid, with the Druze marginalized after a series of coup attempts, while Sunni elements in particular were outraged at an article published in the Ba'ṯ's military journal denouncing God and insulting religion on the eve of war. It was Jadid who brought Asad in as the defense minister after the radical "neo-Ba'ṯist" revolution in 1966, and Asad in turn played a key role in quelling a major rebellion against Jadid, but their alliance unraveled with defeat against Israel. Jadid blamed defeat on the armed forces controlled by Asad, while Asad and his supporters in the army accused the leadership of undermining the army (and thereby its effectiveness in battle) through its political purges.²⁵

These internal problems within the Syrian regime were further compounded by its growing isolation in the region. While the military had supported the government in its more active "defiance" of Israel, there was also an increasing realization in some quarters that the Syrian leadership

was pursuing a radical strategy that, rather than furthering the ideological cause, was proving to be reckless and exposing its vulnerability.

Moreover, without sufficient military support from its Soviet allies or the capacity to back up threats, Syria's belligerence was in fact alienating it from its neighbors, who felt Syria's posturing left them with less room to maneuver. By March 1968, plans were well under way to bring Israel and Jordan together in an agreement in which Israel would return some of the West Bank to Jordan and compensate for refugees, and Jordan would enter into economic cooperation with Israel—thus the United States was set to increase economic aid to Jordan with the view of making it a “showcase country.”²⁶ America's relations with the Saudis, the Lebanese, and increasingly with Egypt provided enough substance to continue with a settlement of the Middle East's problems without Syria. By September 1968, the US State Department privately reported that “all the Arab leaders (with the exception of Syria) genuinely desired an end to the conflict with Israel,” although none of them could express this publicly, given popular opposition to such a move.²⁷

Syria could not afford to tread an isolationist path; the Ba‘thist regime had staked its role and purpose on its regionalist credentials, and to persist with a radical agenda that appeared to advance little else except Soviet geopolitical interests put Syria in a negative light and an awkward contradictory position. However, by 1970, this trend became even more pronounced and problematic for the Syrians: the death of Nasser—increasingly mistrusted by the Syrians for his willingness to even contemplate a settlement with the United States, but still tied to Arab nationalist goals nevertheless—hailed the arrival of Anwar Sadat, initially vocal about his opposition toward Israel and the United States, but fast disassociating himself from a united front with the Syrians.

Given its isolation, the fact that Syria was still entrenched in its hostility toward the United States was something that the United States was able to ignore without (it thought) much consequence. The Jadid regime had portrayed its stance to be based on a fixed and Arab-centric ideology, rather than on common international principles, thus making it easy for the United States and indeed Arab neighbors to dismiss Syria as an inflexible party in any peace plan and, therefore, one that was not worth negotiating with.²⁸ Rather than retaining the purity of Arab nationalist goals, this lack of pragmatism was in fact strategically detrimental to the principles the Syrian regime sought to uphold.

Apart from this ideological debate, there were also straightforward power struggles at the heart of the Ba‘thist regime. Amid this internal turbulence, yet another coup against the government ensued; having at one time quashed an earlier challenge to Jadid's power, Hafez Asad was now

the chief instigator. With his links in the army and the power base he had slowly built up within the party, Asad seized power in 1970, and was to hold onto power against the odds over the next 30 years.

Asad's leadership, notably different from the Jadid regime for its pragmatic approach, marked a turning point in the nature of the Syrian regime, its *strategy* in foreign policy, and the internal stabilization of the state. However, the notion that there was a change in the main substance of Syria's foreign policy as a result of Asad's pragmatism is contestable. Certainly, Asad's leadership was set in different circumstances—regionally and domestically. Syria found itself in a more hostile neighborhood after the 1967 war, even more isolated than before by the growing influence of the United States and military power of Israel, and the softening positions of fellow Arab states toward both. As Israel had shown, its willingness and capacity to retaliate to both military and political provocation was great and extremely costly for the Arabs. Thus, the external constraints on Syria's ideological policies were far greater than they were previously, and willingness to engage in belligerent rhetoric with limited gain had to be checked—especially when its military capacity was continuing to deteriorate.

Moreover, there was growing pressure on Syria's leadership to stabilize the country's economic situation, at a time when surrounding states were increasing in wealth and improving domestic infrastructure. Jeopardizing stability and development at home by inviting tighter sanctions and more military threats was a risk too lightly taken in the past. Finally, the Jadid regime had seen the growing alienation between the Ba'ath Party, whose constituency was increasingly based among the rural and Alawi population, and the rest of the Sunni urban-based population. The former tended to be more radical, the latter less so, and they were becoming alarmed at Syria's regional isolation and the accusations that it harbored a sectarian regime. When Asad took over, he immediately embarked on a project to drastically increase the party membership, particularly in urban areas, in order to raise the government's legitimacy.²⁹

Thus, as a result of the different circumstances that Asad found himself in, it is argued here that he was indeed more pragmatic than his predecessors within the Ba'ath Party, due to a host of domestic and external pressures and constraints, but not necessarily less ideological in goals. Numerous events had shown that there was no such thing as glorious failure in the pursuit of "ideologically pure" policies, adopted more for the sake of party endorsement than for the increasingly alienated Syrian population and principles of Arab nationalism; rather, the greatest threat to those principles were now seen to be Syria's marginalization and yet another external reconfiguration of the region in the absence of an Arab nationalist voice.

Given the way in which Syria's vision of Arab nationalism had evolved, the most important aspect of the ideology, in practice and increasingly in principle, was its opposition to external interference and lack of regional autonomy. A radical stance that (a) purported to be holding true to a regionalist ideology, but which in fact led to marginalization and irrelevance, and (b) provoked war and in turn destabilized the country and the region, thereby inviting yet more external involvement, was seen as far more detrimental to the core ideological goals and security of the region than measured pragmatism. The notion, however, that Asad was ready to sacrifice all his political beliefs, especially given his personal experiences in his youth, does not give enough recognition to the power of ideas. Understanding how Asad's pragmatism was firmly situated in an ideological framework is an important nuance.

Asad's Pragmatism and the Impact on Syrian-American Relations

Asad brought this pragmatic approach not just to Syrian domestic policies, but importantly to foreign policy as well. Having seen the failure of its policy of nonengagement, and the continued deference toward Israel by both the United States and other Arab states, Asad sought to temper Syria's hostility toward the Americans and thereby raise its input in regional affairs. This was reflected on a number of levels. For example, after the 1967 war, Syria had refused to receive Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Joe Sisco in Damascus, and designated its deputy foreign minister, Zakaria Ismail, as the primary channel of communication—this had represented a fairly low level of diplomatic contact between the two states, and was a deliberate signal to the United States that Syria did not seek closer relations. After becoming president, however, Asad changed this policy by accepting the need for direct communication.

The olive branch was also extended in other areas such as trade. Thus, Syria changed its policy of boycotting US goods, and began placing requests for sales of equipment that was of nonlethal military use—indeed, the Syrians had sought to extend this trade to armaments in general, although the United States refused. It is plausible to see this as a strategic decision by Syria, to use trade as a means by which to increase its leverage with the United States.

This policy change can also be explained by the USSR's unreliability as allies, unable to provide Syria with the modern weaponry and equipment it needed, of which their Israeli enemies had been able to take advantage. Ghaleb Kayali, ex-member of the Syrian Foreign Office,

confirmed that the Syrian government had become disenchanted with the Soviets.³⁰ Furthermore, Asad personally had doubts about Soviet intentions and influence over Syria, and began to create a greater distance between Damascus and Moscow. Syria successfully resisted signing a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1972 although both Egypt and Iraq had done so. Of course, ties were not severed—in particular, the military links remained strong. In 1973, Syria received three times the number of Soviet fighter aircrafts in the first half of the year than it had received in 1972, while Syria had acquired \$200m worth of Soviet arms, and there were 1,400 Soviet advisors in Syria by June 1973.³¹ Nevertheless, there continued to be strained relations, exacerbated when the Soviet military failed to come to Syria's aid when 13 of its aircraft were shot down in September 1973. The shift in relations had a positive impact in Washington, which observed that Syria was "disposed to expand and improve its relations with other countries and to rely less exclusively on the Soviets for outside support."³²

In more substantial policy areas, Syria also demonstrated signs of accommodation and flexibility. In 1971, the United States highlighted Syria's rejection of UN Security Council Resolution 242 as well as its consistent support for the admission of the People's Republic of China (in replacement of Nationalist China) to the UN as the key areas of US-Syrian disagreement.³³ But on March 8, 1972, Asad finally accepted Resolution 242, four and a half years after it had been passed. However, he was at pains to reiterate that the Arab people had two aims "from which they will not deviate or abandon: liberation of the occupied land and restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people."³⁴ Asad argued that any international effort by Arab republics should reflect these two aims. While his change over 242 could be portrayed as an embarrassing climb-down, this was not how Asad perceived it—rather, he felt it would mean the United States could no longer "keep the Golan Heights out of the Jarring picture." Asad was well aware that the lack of any US attention to the Israel-Syrian front was in part due to Syria's nonacceptance of 242.

At first, the United States indicated a positive reciprocation to Syria's concessions, particularly in the State Department. It still maintained its policy of embargoing military shipments to countries that had broken diplomatic ties, but by 1972, the State Department did *consider* supplying weapons to the Syrians as an exception to its general policy, calculating that even an improvement of 50 percent of the Syrian military cargo vehicle fleet would not significantly "change the basic quotient in the area."³⁵ The State Department considered increasing wider nonmilitary trade with Syria and showed willingness to overlook arrears in Syria's repayment of development loans. Moreover, Syrian interest in purchasing military equipment

from the United States rather than the Soviet Union was recognized as a positive move and a sign that the Syrian government sought to reduce tensions between Washington and Damascus.³⁶ The State Department also recognized the economic potential of Syria's growing petroleum industry.

Moreover, with regard to the peace process in the Middle East region, the State Department gained further confidence from Syria's firm stance against fedayeen activities on its own soil, despite Syria's rhetorical support for the fedayeen elsewhere. Crucially, the State Department perceived that the Syrians were ready to strike a political compromise with the Israelis, even if they continued to "talk tough" in public and had initially rejected UN Resolution 242. And finally, what the State Department regarded as the "best indication of improved Syrian Government attitudes" was Syria's request for weekly visits to Damascus from the American consul in Lebanon—the United States felt that this augured well for future diplomatic relations and positioning of US personnel in Syria, which had hitherto been prohibited.³⁷ The following makes the State Department's perspective clear:

Syria remains a negative factor in Middle East peace-making efforts, but under the Asad regime, which came to power following failure of Syria's attack on Jordan in late 1970, it is moving in the direction of greater pragmatism.³⁸

The new Syrian government was also described by the US ambassador to Syria as

More pragmatic, more responsible and less ideologically motivated than the previous Syrian regime. While of course the regime's policies leave something to be desired, this is a relative matter and our actions and reactions can be helpful in shaping the Syrian Government's future policies.³⁹

While the following statement from the State Department provides another exposé on America's perceptions and its policy intent toward Syria:

... if we can re-establish an American presence in Damascus, despite Syrian and Ba'athi political sensitivity, there is a chance of starting a dialogue which could lead to creation of vested interests on both sides in reaching a settlement of our relatively minor bilateral financial problems. I very much doubt we could offer the Syrians, as an opening gambit, enough economic aid to persuade them to let us in through the political door; but through the economic route there is a chance of gradually rebuilding a position of some modest influence in Damascus.⁴⁰

There were of course ongoing areas of disagreement.⁴¹ But overall, there were clear signals of cooperative intent and indeed major policy changes on the Syrian side (as seen with the acceptance of Resolution 242), which were in turn picked up and understood by the State Department. The United States responded—to an extent—by approving the rather modest sale of 4,000 trucks and 175 ambulances, an example of one of the few instances of US-Syrian trade, particularly in areas of defense. However, despite such justifications provided by the State Department, President Nixon still refused to permit the sale of nonlethal military equipment to go ahead.

What, then, can be gauged from these developments about US perceptions of Syria? What is clear from such statements above is the State Department held the view that a more pragmatic Syrian government—one that was demonstrating greater strategic awareness—would also be, to a certain extent, abandoning its ideological principles. Moreover, the State Department reasoned that a greater level of communication and financial transaction should also incline Syria's future policies toward a more US-friendly position.⁴² The State Department was further encouraged in this view by Syria's renewed diplomatic ties with Jordan (which had been broken off since 1970), seeing that it could lead to a political realignment of the region—namely into one less hostile toward Israel. Thus, it was stated:

By choosing to rejoin the Arab mainstream and associate with "moderate" states such as Egypt and Jordan, Syria may be tacitly opting for the benefits which might accrue from a negotiated settlement to the Middle East problem... there are also unsubstantiated reports that by being increasingly reasonable and repairing her relations with Jordan, Syria stands to gain increased financial support from Saudi Arabia.⁴³

Such actions, including increased clampdowns on the fedayeen movement, were interpreted by the State Department as Syria's growing willingness to put national interests first before the interests of its ideological allies, and by extension a greater willingness to reach a settlement with its ideological foes. It would seem that they anticipated that with a Syrian-Israeli agreement, Syria would eventually follow a nonideological path, just as they were to witness with Egypt after the 1973 war. This in itself reflects a key motivation behind any political engagement by the Americans—any political compromises with regard to the conflict were expected from the Syrian side, rather than the Israeli side. Notably, no mention was made about the potential return of the Golan Heights as a result of Syria's increased cooperation.

There are three further questions that can be raised from this. First, how significant was the change in Syria's policies since the arrival of Asad, and how great was the potential for greater cooperation at this stage? Second, was the State Department accurate in its view that the Syrian government was indeed becoming increasingly pragmatic and therefore less ideological and willing to thaw the ice in US-Syrian relations? Third, given the State Department was so keen to increase the level of US economic assistance to Syria, why did this ultimately stall, as it did, on the American side?

First, the conciliatory overtures by Asad's government were indeed highly significant in the context of Syria's recent and indeed long-term history. Given that there had been no formal diplomatic relations between Syria and the United States under the Ba'athist regime prior to Asad's presidency, and given the extent of Syria's hostility toward the United States and its opposition toward Resolution 242—albeit minimal in its eventual impact—the pragmatic shift under Asad marked a critical period for US-Syrian relations that contained the potential for substantial engagement and dialogue between the two states. In the post-1967 political stalemate between Syria and the United States, it was Syria that made the first move toward engagement with the Americans. This move was made, it should be remembered, without Syria receiving any assurances about the return of the Golan Heights or indeed a resolution of any of the issues affecting the Arabs.

Second, let us assess the State Department's prognosis of the Syrian government and its suggested policies for greater economic collaboration. The prevailing analysis of Syria in this period tends to follow the State Department's assessment that Syria's increased pragmatism under Asad would lead to a gradual abandonment of its ideological fervor and opposition to Israel. However, it is contended here that (a) the State Department was overoptimistic in its belief that through greater economic relations, the United States could sway Syrian policies in the political field; and (b) its high level of expectation from the Syrians in fact jeopardized the prospects for dialogue. The use of economic and financial assistance as both a political and ideological tool was a recurring aspect in US foreign policy. However, what the State Department arguably did not consider was the extent to which Syria also shared its appreciation for the value and power of economic aid.

However peripheral a goal it sometimes became in its policies, Syria's links with socialism, as well as its observance of the cosy relationship between some of its conservative oil-rich Arab neighbors and the West, meant that Syria remained wary of accepting widespread assistance beyond what it felt it urgently needed—especially assistance with political conditions attached. Indeed, the consistent element in Syrian policies was

its caution in incurring any debts to other nations. The State Department even acknowledged that Syria had always faithfully paid off its debts to the United States.⁴⁴ Syria's historical and ideological perspective held that to be indebted to other countries risked the loss of independence, and risked a long-term obligation to repay those debts not only financially, but also politically. This was reflected by Syrian governments during the 1940s and 1950s even before the Ba'ath came into power.⁴⁵ Crucially, this caution over receiving economic *aid* did not mean Syria was not willing to enter into substantial *trade*, provided it would not be indebted to another state. Even after the United States refused the sale of military equipment, and even when relations began to deteriorate again, Syria notably persisted in its requests to *purchase* weapons from the United States.⁴⁶ For Syria, the wish to buy weapons from the United States reflected a strategic need to restore military parity in the region, and in particular to rectify the military imbalance between Syria and Israel that was so obviously exposed during the 1967 war. Hence, requests for increased American trade from the Syrians can in fact be seen as a continued commitment to its ideological goals, while the State Department were too presumptuous about the implications of Asad's increased pragmatism.

Moreover, it can be argued that American expectations and demands for Syria on the back of this increased pragmatism were unrealistic, failing to take account of the entrenched nature of Syrian opposition toward Israeli policies. As a result, it created a disincentive for further cooperation on the Syrian side. The State Department's willingness to engage more with the Syrians was based on the belief and expectation that Syria should have to make the whole shift toward the US and Israeli positions, without any reciprocal movement the other way. On the face of it, Washington claimed to recognize the need for "dialogue" to stem the "Syrians' ability to play a spoiling role" in the region,⁴⁷ but it would appear that their understanding of the purpose of dialogue was to convince and convert the Syrians to a pro-western position. However, dialogue can only be diplomatically effective if it is a two-way process of compromise and sacrifice. The mismatch in their relative objectives for dialogue meant that conditions were ripe for increased frustration from both the Syrian and American sides and a growing perception that the other party was not genuinely interested in compromise.

Finally, we come to the question of Nixon's objection to the sale of military equipment to the Syrians, despite the initially positive views of the State Department on increased economic trade. One possible argument is that Nixon recognized more accurately the long-term motives of the Syrian regime and the unlikelihood that it would substantially alter its policy

toward the United States and Israel without major demands of its own that the United States could not meet. This argument, however, is unlikely. The State Department had a greater awareness and grasp of Syria's position than the president's office, which was traditionally far more conscious of domestic factors. The State Department did in fact express reservations about Asad's ability to maneuver, given a number of constraints at the domestic level—they argued that "Syria is experiencing a moment of frustration" (as surmised by the Italian ambassador) because President Asad was

inclined toward moderation but there are various forces at work which could prevent Asad from cooperating in the peace effort; the Army, the radicals and others seem to be unhappy with the cease-fire and to favour more fighting. Asad wants to do what Sadat did but is torn between various segments of Syrian society.⁴⁸

First of all, it cannot be ascertained from such a document that Asad really did want to imitate Sadat in striking a truce, eventually, with the Israelis and the United States. This notion is contradicted by the documents on US-Syrian discussions in the contentious years ahead, and it also makes no mention of Asad's suspicions about Sadat and the direction he was taking at this stage. But even had he been seeking a truce with Israel, the documents once again suggest that the Syrian leadership had to consider the sentiments and political outlook of various sectors of Syrian society. Indeed, US officials seemed surprised to find "conservative, highly pro-western Syrian[s]" in line with the general popular mood against Israel and the United States' "harsh" attitude toward Syria.⁴⁹ Despite Asad's pragmatic turn, Syria's foreign policy was still shaped by ideological motives—whether these motives were held by the regime, or domestic constituents that influenced the regime.

Returning to the president's hesitation to engage more closely with Syria, and to understand the reasons at a deeper level, it is necessary to consider the internal politics in the United States. Throughout the deliberations of whether military sales should go ahead or not, the most important factor for Nixon, and acting as the major obstacle to such a deal, was the likely reaction not just of Israel but particularly the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States.⁵⁰ A change in policy had been proposed and constantly stalled since 1969 due to ongoing problems between Syria and Israel. Back then, a TWA aircraft to Damascus was hijacked shortly before the recommendations were to be made by the State Department, while the Syrian government was judged to be "conducting itself in such an improper fashion" by holding two Israelis that the time was not yet right to press for a policy change.⁵¹

However, even after Syria's conciliatory gestures once Asad came to power, US trade with Syria continued to stall due to fears of how it would be perceived by Israel. Though Nixon was emotionally ambivalent about Israel, not constrained by the same loyalty of his predecessors (or indeed his secretary of state), he was nevertheless beholden to the sentiments of the US Congress, which was still very much in favor of Israel.⁵² The negative coverage that such a transaction—and indeed any example of greater US-Syrian cooperation—might have generated at home among pro-Israeli lobby groups and with Israel itself was a major contributing factor in US policy toward the Syrians.

It was in this context of frustrated Syrian efforts to initiate a settlement that Syria and Egypt embarked on the 1973 war against Israel. The main objectives behind this move were to take back land, rehabilitate their reputation, and restore greater parity to the heavily skewed balance of power in the region. Military action was deemed necessary by Syria and Egypt because the Arabs had so little to bargain with, while their military and strategic inferiority meant they had no way of forcing Israel to the negotiating table. Some level of parity was needed before Israel could be made to see any need for a settlement, given that the post-1967 situation suited it very well; moreover, through conflict, Syria and Egypt intended to show the United States that they were serious players in any negotiation process and still retained political and military agency.

Conclusion

The 1967 war was significant for its constitutive effect on long-term US-Syrian relations. Both structural factors (regional insecurity and colonial legacy) and agency (Asad's personal ties to ideology, Lyndon Johnson's affinity with Israel, and Nixon's domestic concerns) affected Syrian and American policies toward each other. The chapter demonstrated how both structure and agency inform, but are also shaped by, ideas, which in turn become embedded and institutionalized within state policy and public opinion.

At the start of the period under scrutiny, the United States heavily favored Israel in military armaments before and during the 1967 war—this continued with a one-sided arms embargo against the Arab states that did not extend to Israel. Through Syria's subsequent reactions toward the United States, and the crystallization of US negative perceptions of Syrian obstructionism, it is possible to identify this as a period when US-Syrian hostility became especially pronounced and continued along this trajectory for decades to follow. The failure of the United States and indeed the

international community (via the UN) to expel Israel from the occupied territories and apply any sanctions enforced the notion of Israel's impunity after breaching international law.

Following the war, Washington made a crucial policy change in which they no longer sought equilibrium between the Arabs and Israel, but instead decided to give their support to one side, creating a military disparity in the region and also placating domestic Israeli lobby groups. By building up Israel's military and strategic position, the United States aimed to take war off the agenda despite fostering Arab resentment, as well as furthering US economic and strategic objectives against the USSR. The United States also diluted the UN's stipulation for unconditional withdrawal of land occupied during war: by demanding safeguards for Israel's security as a *precondition* before the return of Arab territories, the United States was arguably legitimizing Israeli occupation as a strategic option, despite the illegality of occupation via settlement under international law. This altered Israel's game plan, recognizing that the status quo was now in its favor—thus, obstruction and delays of any settlement suited its own interests and became a favored tactic whenever negotiations threatened to extract Israeli concessions.

The postwar situation also saw Washington develop a second crucial and lasting policy, that of "separate peace." In favoring a piecemeal approach to the region's problems, it directly contradicted Syria's interests and ideological vision for a comprehensive peace settlement. This was facilitated in no small part by the Arab states themselves—the Jordanians' lack of commitment to any ideological goals for example, as well as the transitional nature of the Egyptian government. Thus, Syrian hostility toward both the United States and Israel stood out among other Arab states. Syria was the only state to reject UNSCR 242, on a point of principle. Syrians were also especially aggrieved by the unbalanced arms embargo that prevented the Arab states from matching Israel's military power. And finally the fact that no movement was made by the United States to address the occupation of the Golan Heights, while Egypt and Jordan both had more American attention and sympathy, further fueled Syrian hostility toward the United States for its perceived hypocrisy in the enforcement of international law.

Asad came to power in a period of turmoil both within Syria and in the wider region. Both via his style of leadership and changes in policy, Asad shifted Syria onto a more pragmatic course, but one that was not necessarily less ideological. The main concessions Syria granted the United States was the late acceptance of 242 and the request for increased Syrian-American trade, especially in military equipment. While the US State Department were certainly responsive, they were ultimately too optimistic

about changing Syria's position through economic aid and failed to successfully make the case to the president for an American rapprochement with Syria. The president's office, on the other hand, was to become greatly preoccupied by domestic issues such as the Watergate scandal. Hence, criticisms by the pro-Israeli lobby at home carried even more weight and turned out to be rather influential in preventing the United States from improving its ties with Syria. Thus, by the end of this period, Syria's conciliatory gestures remained unreciprocated by the United States, which continued to impose isolation on the Syrians. Being outsiders to the peace process engendered a deep sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the US role as mediators in the region; such sentiments continued to be entrenched even after Syria's eventual inclusion in negotiations.

Notes

1. Telegram, Parker Hart to Seelye, December 12, 1968, File: Strategic Trade Control, Syria 1973. DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
2. Memo to Washington, November 14, 1968, File: Pol-2, General reports and statistics, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #71D5, Record Group 59, Box 2.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Briefing Paper, Syria, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot #74D416, Box 180.
6. Letter, State Department, December 3, 1968, File: FT-2, Foreign Trade, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5624) Lots #71D5, #71D22, Box 3.
7. Report—*Factors Affecting the Arab Outlook and Prospects*, February 1968, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5624) Lots #71D5, #71D22, Box 3.
8. Ibid.
9. Memo, from SD legal advisor Robert Neuman to Parker Hart, December 16, 1968, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5624) Lots #71D5, #71D22, Box 3.
10. Ibid.
11. Picted.
12. Ibid.
13. Kissinger, *Upheaval*, pp. 215–216.
14. Author's interview with the Syrian ambassador to the UN: Dr. Bashar Ja'afari, February 17, 2009, UN Headquarters, New York City, 11:30–12:30 a.m.
15. Report—*Factors Affecting the Arab Outlook and Prospects*.
16. Ibid.
17. Memo, D. Gamon to Houghton, "US-Syrian Relations—Prospectives," March 31, 1967, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #71D22, Box 4.
18. Briefing Paper, Syria, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic.
19. Letter, Torbert to O'Neill, November 12, 1969, File: Pol-23 TWA, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D4, Record Group 59, Box 6.
20. Briefing Paper, Syria, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic.

21. Memo, D. Gamon to Houghton, "US-Syrian Relations—Prospectives."
22. Hinnebusch, *Revolution*, 13: p. 143.
23. Memo of conversation, September 18, 1968, Folder 2, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #71D5, Record Group 59, Box 2.
24. Memo of conversation, Machlani to D. S. Mak (acting deputy chief of mission), March 27, 1968, Folder 3 of 4, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #71D5, Record Group 59, Box 2.
25. Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process* (Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991), 22.
26. Memo, Paganelli to Houghton, March 1, 1968, File: Pol-Arab/Israel, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #71D5, Record Group 59, Box 2.
27. Memo of conversation, Rizk and Mak, September 17, 1968, Folder 2, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #71D5, Record Group 59, Box 2.
28. Kissinger, *Upheaval*, pp. 197–201.
29. Robert Olsen, *The Ba'th and Syria 1947–1982: The Evolution of Ideology, Party, and State* (Kingston Press, 1982), p. 145.
30. Memo, Houghton to Washington, May 16, 1970, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #72D490, Record Group 59, Box 8.
31. Briefing Paper, Syria, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic.
32. Memo, Sisco to Secretary, December 18, 1970, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #75D16, Record Group 59, Box 10.
33. File, Pol-1, General Policy Syria and Iraq—Entry A1 (5624) Lot #75D16, Record Group 59, Box 11.
34. Memo, Seelye to Sisco, March 10, 1972, Entry A1 (5624) Lot #75D442, Record Group 59, Box 14.
35. Angus Mundy to Kilgore, January 17, 1972, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
36. Memo, Sisco, Atherton, and Talcott Seelye, January 1, 1972, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
37. Ibid.
38. Memo, William P. Rogers to President Nixon, January 24, 1972, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59. The reference to Syria's attack on Jordan relates to Asad's shift from the Jadid position in supporting the fedayeen in Jordan, and opposing their clampdown by the Jordanian regime (1970).
39. Memo, Seelye to Sisco, January 17, 1972, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
40. Memo, Seelye to Joe Sisco, 1973, File 76D451, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
41. For example, Syria's detention in 1972 since September 9 of Major Richard H. Barratt, the US Assistant Army Attaché to Amman.
42. The sale of military equipment was increasingly connected to the possibility of ameliorating the "plight" of Syrian Jews, an issue raised vociferously by domestic US lobby groups, as a way of strengthening the argument in favor of the sale.

43. Memo, Edward Djerejian to Atherton, October 5, 1973, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
44. Memo, Seelye to Joe Sisco, 1973.
45. See Chapter 3 for more detail on this.
46. Memo of conversation, Khaddam and Kissinger, February 26, 1974, Middle East trip follow-up, RG 59, Briefing Books 1958–1976, Lot #75D146, Middle East Trip Follow Up 5/1974, Box 205.
47. Memo, Norman Pratt to Korn, Djerejian, November 9, 1973, File: Political Relations, Syria/US, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
48. Memo, meeting with Italian ambassadors and State Department, including David Korn, Roger Davies, and Charles K. Johnson, November 16, 1973, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
49. Letter, N. Pratt to B. Baas, November 5, 1969, File: Strategic Trade Control, Syria 1973, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
50. Memo, Seelye to Sisco, January 17, 1972.
51. Letter, Bryan Baas to N. Pratt, November 24, 1969, File: Strategic Trade Control, Syria 1973, DEF-12-5, Entry A1 (5630) Lot #76D451, Record Group 59.
52. Kissinger, *Upheaval*, pp. 202–204.

Part III

US-Syrian Engagement: Disengagement Talks 1973–1975

The previous two parts of the book focused on the development of US-Syrian mistrust and the widening rift between the two states. In contrast, the remaining parts of the book will focus on episodes of engagement between Syria and the United States. They assess the strategies of negotiation, the separate motives and perceptions, as well as the pressures—both internal and external—faced by both Washington and Damascus; they also look at why negotiations ultimately failed to produce better relations between the two states.

Part III focuses on the disengagement negotiations from 1973 to 1975. This is an important and influential period, for it not only set the tone for future negotiations between Syria and the United States but also had a lasting impact on the Middle East landscape and set in train unlikely alliances and deep fissures between the states in the region. A number of the questions highlighted in the introduction of the book will be addressed here: What were US demands from Syria in the negotiations, and how reasonable or realistic were they? Did Washington have fixed perceptions of Syrian intransigence—and to what extent did this factor as well as the US relationship with Israel hinder opportunities for peace? Was Syria obstructing the peace process? And why did Syria not follow Egypt in signing a truce with Israel and forming an alliance with the United States?

Before addressing these questions, it is worthwhile considering the prevailing discourse and historiography on the roles of both the United States and Syria during this period. An influential argument presents Syria as playing a spoiler role—unwilling due to its radical ideology to compromise with the United States, unwilling to even acknowledge the existence of

Israel, and instead intent on obstructing other states from making peace.¹ According to this viewpoint, Syria's goals were unrealistic and deliberately unattainable in order to scupper the chances for peace; its motives for perpetuating conflict have been attributed to the regime's need to justify authoritarianism at home and an overbearing influence of the military, while some have argued that Syria was bowing to pressure from a belligerent public.²

This view is particularly strengthened when juxtaposed with the (apparent) willingness, and indeed success, of Egypt, Jordan, and Israel to negotiate and reach settlements. By extension, the United States' successful role in mediating lasting deals between those countries appears to demonstrate American neutrality and fairness. Syria, therefore, bears the brunt of responsibility for the failure to retrieve its lost land, for continued conflict with Israel and as a result bad relations with the United States. The charge has often been, both within the literature and also in policy circles, that Syria did not, and does not, do enough to secure peace—this marks a surprising degree of continuity in the views of Syria before and after Hafez Asad's coming to power, the key difference being that ideology was seen to have been replaced by self-interest and regime security as the prime motivation.³

This assessment is contested by what might be termed as revisionist historical accounts. Patrick Seale's biography of Asad provides an alternative analysis, in which he argues that the United States had little intention of helping Syria to retrieve its land and sought to *avoid* a comprehensive peace settlement that would have safeguarded the rights of Palestinians.⁴ This was not as a response to Syrian obstructionism, but rather it was a position determined long before negotiations began. Seale argues that Washington's, and particularly Henry Kissinger's, primary goal was to support Israel's interests, and by undermining the Arab nationalist movement to also kick out Soviet influence in the region. Egypt, he argues, rather than acting as pragmatic peacemakers, had in fact been too idealistic in its expectations of what the United States could deliver. According to this view, the Syrian-Israeli track failed because of a "duplicitous" American strategy, Israeli intransigence, and Egyptian weakness.⁵ Seale relies on interviews with key players in those negotiations, records of diplomatic cables, and in particular Kissinger's own memoirs. These chapters support this argument, using documentary evidence that had not yet been released when Seale wrote his account. This supplementary primary material further strengthens and develops the revisionist case. The analysis pays particular attention to the roles of four key actors in the eventual failure of a Syrian-Israeli settlement, which has had lasting repercussions for US-Syrian relations: Syria, America, Israel, and Egypt.

Initiating Peace Talks

The United States and Syria: Perceptions, Goals, and Strategies

The previous chapter brought us to the eve of the 1973 war between Egypt, Syria, and Israel. The war was a result of the deadlock that followed the earlier war of 1967 and the devastating defeat for the Arabs. With Israel occupying and settling on captured Arab lands, and content with the status quo, the Arabs had little to no bargaining power in any peace process in order to retrieve their land and restore military and political balance in the region. With Resolution 242 still not enacted by Israel, Syria and Egypt launched a military attack on Israel on October 6, 1973, to turn around the disadvantage. Despite gains at the start of the war, and though the war served to challenge the notion of Israel's invincibility, the Arab armies were ultimately pushed back by Israel's counteroffensive, having to relinquish the Sinai and Golan, and suffering many casualties.

On October 24, 1973, Egypt agreed to a cease-fire without securing any Israeli commitments to withdrawal and without consulting with Asad, which forced Syria to follow suit, since it could not have fought the war alone.⁶ This fragile cease-fire was to be followed up with a multilateral conference to be held in Geneva under UN auspices to enable talks among all parties and ratification of agreements. While it had often been the case that Syria followed Egypt's lead in foreign policy issues, on this occasion the cease-fire proved to be a highly controversial decision and was met with widespread opposition in Syria, particularly among the public and the military.⁷ Syrians felt that the Arabs had more to gain if the war was prolonged, which in turn would have vastly strengthened their hand not only in negotiations but in the region's overall balance of power. Moreover, Asad felt that the American-contrived cease-fire was not merely a cessation of hostilities by all parties (which Israel reneged on anyway by continuing to fight on the Egyptian front), but in fact ensured that the war ended in

Israel's favor and on Washington's terms.⁸ In Syria's eyes, the end of the war might bring Israel to the negotiating table, but it had done nothing to force Israel to relinquish the Arab territories it had occupied since 1967 as was the original aim—the potential advantages that might have been accrued from the war had thus been significantly limited.

This was, at first glance, less the case for Egypt, which stood a much better chance of regaining the Sinai: as Kissinger affirmed, the Sinai was of far less strategic value to the Israelis than the Golan Heights, while Sadat was also showing greater signs of cooperation with the United States.⁹ Sadat had already made agreements for a cease-fire in the Suez Canal and accepted intervention of the UN Emergency Force, paving the way for the return of Israeli POWs. Despite Asad's increased pragmatism, conciliatory gestures toward the United States, and concessions prior to the war, Washington still felt he had not gone far enough. Thus, progress on an Egyptian-Israeli settlement was pushed with far greater intent and effort by the Americans.

Little had changed, then, in US perceptions of Syria. Syria was still viewed as being of less importance than the other parties, just as it had been in 1967. As seen in the previous chapter, Washington's approach had been to isolate Syria and largely to ignore Syrian demands and grievances. To an extent, this was in response to the high levels of hostility toward the United States among the Syrian public, media, and politicians that followed the war. But it was also based on deeply set perceptions and assumptions about Syrian radicalism and intransigence that seemed to make dialogue redundant in the view of the United States.¹⁰

As had been the case previously, Washington initially felt that the onus of engagement should remain firmly with the Syrians, saving the United States from having to make difficult concessions to bring them into negotiations. They expected Syria would come to this decision themselves because of two key developments:

- (1) With Egypt reestablishing diplomatic relations with the United States, and establishing an Egyptian-Israeli agreement on the implementation of a cease-fire (under US auspices), it was hoped that it would have a domino effect on Syria. Norman Pratt expressed this view, stating that Syria had a "habit of taking its foreign policy lead from Egypt".¹¹ Egypt's resumption of relations with the United States was seen as providing Syria with greater flexibility with its people to do the same.¹²
- (2) The United States was relying on Syria's fears of being isolated amid these developments with an Arab-Israeli peace that excluded them.¹³ This seemed to be supported by Syria's delayed acceptance

of UN Resolution 242, and eventual acceptance of 338, which marked the end of the October War. Given that these developments occurred without any American engagement, they now saw the merits of allowing Syria to persist with its fears of isolation so that it would feel compelled to follow Egypt, rather than building on the nascent dialogue that was started after Asad came to power. Thus it was stated:

Strategically, I assume the US continues to desire restoration of relations with all Arab States, including Syria. On the tactical level, however, I see advantage in letting the next move be that of the Syrians towards the US which appears probable as a result of these old fears. Thus any new negotiations should begin at the initiation of the Syrians, and around a larger package of conditions (given the likelihood that Syria would try to cut them down through bargaining), rather than the other way round.¹⁴

This lack of American urgency in addressing Syria's issues was reflected in the US-Soviet discussions for an overall settlement in the Middle East, which took place on October 1, 1973. There, the Egyptian front (a return to the former international border) and the Jordanian front (the 1949 armistice line) were agreed upon, and arrangements were made for Jerusalem to be an open, unified city. But they took "no position on the Syrian border, since Syria was not a negotiating party in the Jarring talks, nor had it [initially] accepted SC Resolution 242."¹⁵ Notably, the Soviet Union, despite its strong alliance with Syria, did not push for discussions on the Golan Heights. As a result, Syria's future was not even discussed at these talks. The earlier rejection of UNSC 242 by the Jadid regime had greatly prejudiced the United States against Syria's intentions and capacity for peace, despite the change of regime, the openness to dialogue under Asad, and the acceptance by 1973 of both resolutions 242 and 338. This was a lesson of nonreciprocation that Asad learned quite soon into his presidency. Egypt had also entered into war against Israel in 1973, effectively breaching 242, yet both they and the Jordanians had entered peace negotiations before the end of the year, receiving very different treatment from the United States. In turn, a growing ambivalence toward US-led negotiations began to take root in Syria.

Thus, it soon became apparent to the Americans that their predictions and policies toward Syria had been miscalculated.¹⁶ The view that Syria would follow Egypt had to be reassessed, for it showed no signs of doing so. At this time, Egypt was moving ahead with the United States in its bilateral relations, placing greater pressure on Syria. Egypt already signed

agreements in late November 1973 with Exxon and Mobil for offshore oil prospecting in the Middle East, involving around \$75 million in investments by companies over a number of years. US oil industries had already invested about \$200 million in their Egyptian operations. The United States also made available \$500,000 in Egyptian pounds for use by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Egyptian Red Crescent, and gave a further \$1 million for further US assistance-aid after war.¹⁷ These financial rewards can be explained by Egypt's compliance (particularly in comparison to Syria's stance) over disengagement plans. Notably during Egypt's bilateral talks with the United States and disengagement arrangements with Israel, there was no mention at all of the Golan Heights or the plight of the Palestinians. They focused squarely on Egyptian national interests. And even then Egypt had, it appeared to many, sold *itself* short—the “6-point agreement” that the Egyptians and Israelis had settled on came under severe criticism from Egypt's own public and its neighbors, not least because Egypt was willing to accept it fully while Israel set about implementing it only selectively.¹⁸

There were enough financial and security incentives here for a weak state like Syria to follow Egypt's example. And yet, rather than being swayed by Egypt, Syria was one of its greatest critics.¹⁹ The State Department's optimism that Egypt's policies would facilitate a cooling of Syrian hostility toward the American-Israeli relationship was also misplaced, as it discovered when it claimed that Syria acted like “Cold War Communists” and saw the United States as the “promoter of Zionist-imperialist conspiracies; armer and supporter of Israeli expansionism; the dedicated enemy of the Arabs.”²⁰ The prediction that Syria would naturally follow in Egypt's conciliatory footsteps was therefore not as accurate or straightforward as it had initially seemed.

In addition to this realization, it became apparent that Syria did not fear isolation enough to rush into negotiations. Indeed, while it was not the strongest or biggest actor in the region, the United States better understood Syria's ability to affect regional alignments and chance for peace in the region. The view that Syria was dispensable in regional affairs was thus changing:

[Of the] three Arab combatants, Syria has been the most intransigent and the least anxious to travel the path of peace. If it remains so, Syria could—at the very least seriously complicate the task of bringing peace to the Middle East, for Egyptian and Jordanian leaders will feel inhibitions about settling with Israel in the absence of Syria.²¹

The United States now feared that instead of being pressured to follow Egypt, Syria could be swayed back into a more radical position, possibly

influencing other Arab states given the mood of the country and the “delusion and isolation” it was feeling.²² There were two key forthcoming events at which Syria could exercise this influence—an Arab summit, and the UN summit in Geneva. Both summits were significant in that they would provide a collective forum to discuss the situation in the Middle East. With so many parties involved, these summits had the potential to either lay down a comprehensive peace settlement that everyone could work with, or they could result in greater deadlock and polarization of views. Both America and Israel were not in favor of such summits, which could also be used by each faction to rally more countries around their cause. Israel felt it stood a much greater chance of getting what it wanted and to dilute Arab demands through bilateral discussions;²³ the United States concurred, seeing the advantages of taking the lead in shuttle diplomacy, where it could direct the discussion, revealing or holding back information where necessary, rather than getting the parties to meet directly.

Given that the summits could not be cancelled, and given that Washington’s strategy for “separate peace” in the region now seemed at stake, the United States recognized that greater effort needed to be exerted to bring the Syrians in line with Egypt’s position *prior* to the two summits. If this could not be secured beforehand, the United States feared Syria would act as spoilers during the Geneva conference.

Thus, the United States was forced to change its strategy. Clearly, the Syrians were in no mood to initiate yet further concessions for the Americans, but nor could they be ignored: Syria had to be engaged bilaterally and more directly through diplomacy initiated by the United States. Thus began Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy.

Kissinger’s Visit to Damascus

Dr. Henry Kissinger, the US secretary of state, embarked on a tour of the Middle East in the December of 1973. Kissinger had adopted a greater personal role in international affairs than his predecessors, and came to have a high degree of influence in US foreign policy, particularly as President Nixon became mired in the Watergate affair. Kissinger took a personal interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict, not only, as he acknowledged, because of his Jewish roots and deeply felt connection with Israel, but also because of its impact on American interests.²⁴ He was to play a significant role in the outcome of negotiations and the region’s politics for years to come.

With his Middle East tour, the United States sought to forward a disengagement process between Syria and Israel along similar lines of the Egyptian-Israeli process. From Syria’s perspective, attention to this issue was long overdue, but from the US perspective, they merely wanted to

eliminate those issues that could “imperil” the Geneva conference.²⁵ These issues were the following: first, Israel was refusing to “sit with the Syrians” until they provided a full list of Israeli POWs and agreed for them to receive Red Cross visitations; second, Syria had set its preconditions (1) that Israel should return to the October 22 lines; (2) that it should agree to abide by the Geneva Convention on the non-transfer of population to occupied territory (such as the Israeli Golan Heights settlements); and (3) that 15,000 displaced Syrian villagers must be repatriated.²⁶ On Syria’s part, these were key points of contention that it felt had been sidelined in the search for a more short-term peace settlement. Despite Syria’s consistent demands, the United States persisted with the line that the Syrian position remained unclear²⁷—this became a recurring theme that served to portray the Syrians as ambiguous and indecisive and indeed propped up the perception that their demands were neither rational nor negotiable.

To persuade Syria to at least embark on a disengagement process, Kissinger paid a visit to Damascus in December 1973—this represented the first visit from a secretary of state since Dulles’ visit in 1953. For Asad and his advisors, this was the first time they were to meet a senior US official at all—such had been the level of estrangement between the two states. This marked a rare example where the United States did not underestimate the importance of the trip. Prior to traveling, Kissinger was briefed that his visit to Damascus would “in many ways be the most challenging and one of the most important of the stops on your current Middle East itinerary,” and was warned that the Syrians “will be forming first-hand impressions which will be of lasting importance.”²⁸ Moreover, on the Syrian side, it was another example of the change undergone by the Syrian regime—the very fact that Asad was willing to receive Kissinger in Syria for talks showed their genuine interest in reaching a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was the nature of that resolution that was to become the cause of contention between Syria and the United States, not the need for a resolution itself.

While the importance of Asad’s role in making Syria a credible party in negotiations was recognized in Washington, they remained conflicted in their views of Syria and arguably found it difficult to move beyond timeworn perceptions about the Syrians. In briefing Kissinger, the State Department stated that the Syrians, due to their military background, were not suited to negotiation or inclined to compromise, and yet they highlighted Asad’s “flexibility and sense of realism . . . in contrast to the more ideological approach of some other members of the ruling elite.”²⁹ This reflects a confusion over the Syrian regime’s approach and how best to deal with them.

Prior to the visit, Kissinger set out with the following aims for his talks with the Syrians:

1. To ensure that the Syrians understood how the peace conference in Geneva would proceed, and that the United States appreciated its views.
2. Convey America's views on how the peace process must proceed if it was to work.
3. Build a relationship of trust and confidence with the Syrian leaders, thus making it possible for the United States to "*talk to and influence them* as peace negotiations proceed."
4. Encourage a "pragmatic" Syrian approach to negotiation on territorial matters and Palestinian representation at the peace conference.
5. Move Syrians toward agreement with Israel on the exchange of POWs, if progress on the other fronts was not made.³⁰

In terms of what should be on the agenda during the talks, the United States identified four topics: (1) to gauge Syrian views on total Israeli withdrawal and the rights of Palestinians; (2) to apply pressure on Syria to return the Israeli POWs since nothing could move forward without this, reminding them that Egypt had already done this; (3) to discuss the possibilities of having a permanent Syrian diplomat in Washington rather than intermediaries; and (4) to discuss the return of two US citizens, detained by Syria on charges of espionage for Israel in 1972.

The general thrust of both the aims and the agenda for the US-Syrian meeting could be summed up as being focused on Israeli demands for the POWs' return, conveying prearranged plans for how the Geneva conference should run and what it should achieve (the subtext being that there were no alternative plans), building Syrian trust in the United States in order to boost Washington's influence over them, and finally discussing Syria's demands—not to take them into consideration, but in order to persuade them otherwise. While diplomacy necessarily involves the art of persuasion to win over the other party to one's own position, it ought to be remembered that the United States was playing the role not of an opponent in this situation, but supposedly a neutral mediator. There is very little evidence here to suggest that the United States was attempting to consider the demands and "red-lines" of both Israel and Syria in equal terms, and to then seek a point of mutual compromise. Rather, the point of the discussions was to persuade and pressurize Syria to move toward a settled US position—it helped the Americans to present it as the "middle ground" now that Egypt had seemingly been won over to it, but in reality the expected compromises were mostly one-sided.

The chances for success during these talks appear to have been limited from the start given that Washington's aims hardly matched up to Syrian objectives before the talks. This would become a common theme behind

US-Syrian negotiations, where the gulf between their respective goals was too great to enable significant progress. In this instance, Syria's aims were (1) to assess how willing the United States was to support Arab demands for full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders, as stipulated in resolutions 242 and 338 and the Geneva Convention; and (2) to emphasize their demands for the satisfaction of Palestinian rights, and the potential and willingness for ongoing conflict if these demands were not met.³¹

Syria's demands had arguably not changed since the 1967 war, and indeed with regard to the Palestinians' situation, Syria's position had not changed since 1948. Thus, what the United States termed as inflexible and intransigent was a consistency of political demands that had not yet been addressed with any seriousness, or purpose, by the United States. For the Syrians, it was hard to see why they should compromise on those basic demands that tallied with international law when there was no evidence of compromise forthcoming from the Israelis. From the military perspective that the Syrian government was rooted in, war had been demonstrated to be a necessary tool by which balance of power was maintained and unruly states could be in kept in check; peace settlements on the other hand were supposed to embed stability and nonbelligerence when both had been initiated by all parties. It served little purpose to pursue a settlement, therefore, if neither of those conditions had been achieved. As the Syrians saw it, the Palestinians were still suffering the consequences of 1948—without territory and still living as refugees—while Israel still occupied land from three Arab states seized in 1967, and remained notably ambivalent about the likelihood of their return even after a peace settlement.³²

It is evident from documentary records that Washington viewed Syria's inclusion in negotiations as instrumental to their own interests and the aims they had for other states³³—US-Syrian talks were not intended to secure any concrete settlements for Syria itself. Thus, should the talks fail to produce any satisfactory resolution for Syria, this was not going to trouble Washington. Indeed, the intervening years between the two wars had provided the United States with an interesting insight into Syria's role—not only the extent to which it could play a spoiler role, which the United States now recognized should be avoided,³⁴ but also the extent to which Syria's arm was limited. It could not, for example, ignite war on its own, or attack Israel without first assuring support from its neighbors. Kissinger's observation that "you could not make war without Egypt, but you could not make peace without Syria" was, in this context, rather accurate. Washington was forming the calculation, one that would influence its policy for many years, that if it failed to deliver any of Syria's demands, the consequences would be minimal and need not scupper US or Israeli interests, both of which could still be pursued via the separate peace strategy.

The key factor in this calculation was the extensive compliance of other Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan, which would consolidate Syria's marginalization. As long as the United States was still unsure of Egypt and Jordan's long-term compliance, Syria was still needed in the process:

We can be sure that the Syrians will be the least reasonable and the most demanding of the three Arab states which are direct parties to conflict . . . Still it is in our interests to have them involved in the negotiations, if only because Syria could play a spoiling role to defeat any initiatives for a peaceful settlement by exerting political pressure on other Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan, to take a more militant stand vis-à-vis Israel, and at worst, by resuming hostilities.³⁵

It is clear from the start of negotiations that the United States had very little intention of securing a long-term Syrian-Israeli settlement but instead hoped to distract them from obstructing the other parties.³⁶ For if the United States did not at least give the appearance that Syria was being engaged as well, both Egypt and Jordan might withdraw for fear of the criticism that would be leveled at them by the Syrians. In short, Syria's involvement was vital to retain the public credibility of negotiations, and to satisfy onlookers that the United States was being balanced and was considering the interests of all parties, and that other negotiating parties such as Egypt and Jordan were not "selling out."

Notes

1. For example, see: Kissinger, *Upheaval*, 1048; Robert Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours, Syria, Israel and Lebanon* (Lynne Rienner, 2003), pp. 24–25.
2. Fred Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War*.
3. Author's interview with Eliot Abrams, Washington, DC, June 2009; interview with Andrew Tabler, May 2009.
4. See Seale's *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East*, and the chapter "The October Illusion" (pp. 202–225), for an excellent exposition of the war. It details the extent of American collusion with Israel to ensure Israel ended the war with the upper hand, as well as weakening the Arab states as much as possible before the start of negotiations. It also highlights the lethargy of Soviet support. And finally, it explains how the seeds of Asad's mistrust of Sadat were sown, based on cables and documents remaining from the war.
5. Seale, *Asad*, p. 248.
6. Ibid.
7. Memo, Norman Pratt to Korn, Djerejian, November 9, 1973, File: Political Relations, Syria/US, DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).

8. Seale, *Asad*, pp. 219–224.
9. Quandt describes Sadat as “emphatic” in wanting to work with the United States for a peace settlement after the war: William B. Quandt, *Peace Process* (University of California Press, 2005), p. 125.
10. See Chapter 4 by the author.
11. Memo, Norman Pratt to Korn, Djerejian, November 9, 1973, File: Political Relations, Syria/US, DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
12. To a certain extent this was also encouraged by the Egyptians—see David Hirst and Irene Beeson, *Sadat* (Faber, 1981), p. 173: Ismail Fahmy was reported to have told the Americans at a banquet: “if you win the friendship of Egypt you win the friendship of the Arab world.”
13. Briefing paper, Syria’s position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference, File: Kissinger’s visit to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180.
14. Memo, Norman Pratt to Korn, Djerejian, 9/11/1973, File: Political Relations, Syria/US, DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
15. Summary, US-Soviet discussions, October 1, 1973, File: Kissinger’s visit to Middle East 1973, RG 59, Lot #74D416, Box 180.
16. In support of this, Quandt argues that “only gradually did Kissinger come to perceive Syria’s importance”: *Peace Process*, p. 133.
17. Briefing paper, Kissinger’s Middle East trip, December 13–17, 1973, File: Secretary’s visit to Egypt, RG 59, Lot #74D416, Box 180.
18. Telegram, Cairo to Washington, December 2, 1973, Briefing paper, Kissinger’s Middle East trip, December 13–17, 1973, File: Secretary’s visit to Egypt, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180. Also see: Quandt, who argues Kissinger was surprised at Sadat’s agreement to the plan: *Peace Process*, p. 137.
19. Telegram, Cairo to Washington, December 2, 1973, Briefing paper, Kissinger’s Middle East trip, December 13–17, 1973, File: Secretary’s visit to Egypt, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180.
20. SD Briefing paper, Syria, December 1973, File: Visit of Secretary Kissinger to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, Boxes 180–183.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Memo, Norman Pratt to Korn, Djerejian, November 9, 1973, File: Political Relations, Syria/US, DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
23. Melvin A. Friedlander, *Sadat and Begin* (Westview Press, 1983), P. 28.
24. Kissinger, *Upheaval*, p. 203.
25. Briefing paper, Kissinger’s Middle East trip, December 13–17, 1973, File: Secretary’s visit to Egypt, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. SD Briefing paper, Syria, December 1973, File: Visit of Secretary Kissinger to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973. Boxes 180–183.
29. *Ibid.*

30. Ibid., emphasis added.
31. Ibid.
32. Hafez Asad, interviewed in "Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 7 (2) (Winter, 1978), PP/ 17–201.
33. Briefing paper, Syria's position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.

From Compromise to Breakdown

Terms of Syrian-Israeli Disengagement and US-Syrian Rapprochement

None of the underlying motives discussed in the previous chapter were at the time known to the Syrians, and the United States did succeed in bringing them to the negotiating table. Communication at a high-ranking level was finally established by Kissinger during his visit to Damascus in December 1973. During this period of shuttle diplomacy, he spent many hours in hard negotiations with both foreign minister Abdul-Halim Khaddam and President Asad himself. Previously, Washington had privately commented on the ambiguity of Syria's demands, despite the fact that these had been stipulated on a regular basis and had remained consistent since the 1967 war. Lack of direct contact between the two states had always meant that it was easier for both parties to base assumptions and judgments on hearsay, without the urgency of verifying their positions. These direct talks, therefore, finally allowed the United States to gauge first hand Damascus' position on the controversial cease-fire of the October War, Israel's demands for the return of POWs, and their own terms of agreement in any negotiation process.

Explaining their position, the Syrians stated that they were in a worse position vis-à-vis loss of territory and Israeli encroachment compared to Egypt—they had lost an additional 350 square miles of territory to Israel in addition to the land lost in 1967. Thus, a cease-fire effectively meant a freeze on a situation that was highly favorable to Israel, making it even more difficult to explain the heavy losses incurred by the Syrian army to the Syrian people;¹ those losses would appear to have been in vain if there was not now a complete Israeli withdrawal. While not stated by the Syrian

government, US officials observed this could pose a threat to the regime itself as dissident factions became restless.² Unlike Egypt, there had been no direct contact between Syria and Israel about the cease-fire terms or the exchange of POWs; indeed, Syria took a tougher stance on the whole issue, stating that they were “not interested in any type of partial arrangement such as the November 11 six-point Egyptian-Israeli agreement.” These, the Syrians felt, were half-baked agreements that gave Israel’s encroachments a degree of legitimacy, when according to UN resolutions and the Geneva Convention they had little justification. Expressing this frustration at the lack of any compromise from Israel, Syrian Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Zakaria Ismail stated in a meeting with Sisco and Kissinger:

There are 19 Israeli settlements in Golan and Dayan and others have said that Golan is not negotiable, Jerusalem is not negotiable, Sharm el-Sheikh and the West Bank are not negotiable. How can they reconcile all these things with Resolution 242?³

He lamented that “everybody talks about the ceasefire on the Egyptian front but nobody mentions the problems on the Syrian front,” and decried the imbalance in which Israel demanded the return of POWs but refused to return the dead bodies of Syrian soldiers, once again in contravention of the Geneva Convention.⁴

A further grievance was US handling of the Palestinians. The Syrians learnt that Washington had already settled the format of the Geneva conference, having consulted the Egyptians. The Syrians, once again, had not been consulted. And in these arrangements it was decided that the United States and the Soviet Union would participate as permanent members of the UNSC, along with the main military parties. There was, however, to be no Palestinian delegation. The Syrians expressed their surprise and opposition to this decision in clear terms to the Americans, and continued to challenge them vociferously on this front throughout the negotiation process.⁵ Even more galling was the knowledge that Egypt had given the green light to this glaring omission.

Thus, based on their positions on the above issues, the Syrians set the following conditions for there to be any possibility of moving forward in negotiations: (a) approximately 100 Israeli POWs would only be exchanged after Israel withdrew to the October 22 lines (the day of the cease-fire, after which Israel still advanced into Syrian territory). Syria would only comply with international conventions on POWs if Israel complied with the Geneva Convention (Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention).⁶ (b) Syria demanded the repatriation of the 15,000 Syrians who had been displaced

as a result of the war and Israeli seizure of territory.⁷ (c) Syria demanded the return of the bodies of dead Syrian soldiers, still held by the Israelis.⁸ (d) Syria demanded the inclusion of the Palestinians in the Geneva conference.⁹ (e) Finally, the end result of negotiations must be the “complete” Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and “safeguarding of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people.”¹⁰

Asad had outlined Syria’s overall conditions succinctly in an earlier speech after the war, in which he reiterated that Syria had only accepted the cease-fire and Resolution 338 after Egypt and the Soviet Union had given assurances that Israel would have to withdraw from all occupied territories and the rights of the Palestinians would be restored.¹¹ Hence, Syria made it clear in their negotiations with the United States that they expected and sought no less than these outcomes, and would hold all parties to account of their earlier assurances. With regard to the Geneva conference at the end of the talks, Syria made it clear that it was willing to participate but did not want to attend if their conditions had not been met, simply in order to ratify a peace plan that represented the interests of Israel. Hence, they wanted some agreement with Israel on the above points before agreeing to send a delegation to the conference. Ironically, from the American perspective, it would have served their plans better if indeed Syria were *not* present at the conference, where they might potentially act as “spoilers”—thus, there was even less incentive for the United States to pursue Syria’s demands rigorously.¹²

Compromise and Agreements

Having determined what both parties’ original terms were, we can now look to what agreements were actually made, and the extent to which each side compromised their respective positions. First, Syria did accept the cease-fire in the end, having held off throughout the winter of 1973. This enabled the negotiation process to proceed with a degree of stability. Second, Syria eventually did agree to provide a list of the Israeli POWs to Israel (65 of them altogether) and to allow them to receive Red Cross visitations from March 1974.¹³ Third, Syria agreed to compromise on the initial extent of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights—having at first demanded that Israel withdraw to the October 22 lines, Asad later accepted the condition of Israeli withdrawal to the October 6 lines.¹⁴ These dates were significant, because until October 6, Israel had occupied Mount Hermon on the Golan, a strategic high point that was of great military importance to both sides—after this date Syria had recaptured Mount Hermon during the early phase of the war when they had a number of military successes;

it was toward the end of the war (and notably after the official cease-fire, which was on October 22) that those successes were reversed. Asad's agreeing to drop the demand for the return of Mount Hermon as a precondition for negotiations was therefore a major concession by the Syrians. Fourth, Syria appointed Sabah Qabbani as ambassador to the United States on June 16, 1974, the first diplomatic channel to be established since 1967. The fifth and significant area of compromise came with Syria's acceptance of the first stage of a Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement, signed on May 31, 1974, in Geneva. This did not signal a truce—Syria was adamant the possibility of war should not be taken off the agenda, which would leave Israel unrestrained and unchecked to flex its muscles and dominate in the region. However, it was an agreement to retain the existing cease-fire, without which more long-term negotiations for a lasting peace settlement could not take place.

The Disengagement Agreement elicited some compromises from both the Syrian and Israeli sides. It stipulated that both sides maintain the cessation of military hostilities as initiated by Resolution 338 on October 22, 1973. It also implemented the separation of Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights, demarcating two separate boundaries, with a neutral demilitarized zone in between, where the United Nations Disengagement Observer Forces (UNDOF) were stationed. The eastern boundary marked Syrian territory—this incorporated a 650 km strip of recovered territory through the agreement. But beyond this, no further land occupied since 1967 was returned to Syria, and this was to become the status quo. Finally, according to the agreement, all POWs and bodies of dead soldiers were to be returned by both sides.

While some of Syria's demands had been met, this was still far short of the mark. There was no mention of the return of displaced civilians, there had not been a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Golan–Mount Hermon, and the key strategic points remained under Israeli control. Moreover, the agreement seemed to reduce the issue to a bilateral, territorial one, focusing on the technicalities of demarcation lines. It remained separate from a comprehensive settlement for the whole region, it did not acknowledge the wider grievances Syria held against Israel, and it cemented a situation that was far more favorable to the Israelis, who had always benefited from the bilateralism of the “separate peace” approach.

These limitations of the agreement were not lost on the Syrians. However, they recognized at the time that it was meant to only be an interim deal before more serious negotiations began. And in fact it did lead to a thawing of relations between Syria and the United States, establishing a direct channel of communication that had been lacking up until this point and prompting Kissinger to state that Syrian-American relations had

“greatly improved” as a result.¹⁵ And yet Syria adopted a cautious wait-and-see approach. While Asad sought to explain the advantages of the agreement to the public,¹⁶ the Americans as peace brokers were still on probation in Syria’s eyes, and the Syrians did not intend to be too generous with their compliance. And so it was that despite the Disengagement Agreement, grievances began to surface again and relations took a dive by the end of 1974, throwing the prospects for Syrian-Israeli peace into disarray, and in turn undermining the still cold but fledgling relations between Syria and the United States.

Stalemate and Demise of US-Syrian Rapprochement

Syria felt that despite the compromises made on their side, no movement was being made on the Israeli side, while the dynamics of power in the region were shifting evermore in Israel’s favor.

First, Saudi Arabia had terminated the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo, which frustrated and angered the Syrians. It was the Syrian view that they had no right to terminate the embargo as the oil was the property of all the Arabs.¹⁷ Syria’s opposition to the decision to lift the boycott was understood by the media from the lack of any announcement about it from the Syrian government. For Syria, the lifting of the embargo reflected an abandonment of the Arab nationalist cause, given that the plight of the Syrians and the Palestinians in particular was yet to be resolved.

The extent of Syria’s disapproval, and by extension ideological commitment, was reflected by Algerian oil minister Bel’id Abdusalam, who stated: “Syria will approve the decision when Israel withdraws from all Arab occupied territories including Jerusalem.”¹⁸ The United States analyzed that Syria’s opposition to Saudi Arabia’s decision could be explained by three reasons: the need to maintain Syria’s credibility with hard-line factions at home and abroad; that it was “more directed towards Egypt than towards the United States,” since “many within the Syrian regime have since the October War resented unilateral Egyptian decisions affecting Syria without prior consultation”; and, finally, that it reflected real opposition within the Damascus regime to the lifting of the boycott “at a time when Syria has not yet seen any results of the American mediation effort.”¹⁹ It is possible that all the above reasons were accurate; what is clear is that the weakness and collapse of the united Arab front that had emerged during the war caused a deep sense of frustration in Damascus at the lack of Arab nationalist solidarity and concern at Syria’s growing isolation again.

Second, Syria felt that the United States had not gone far enough as mediators. It was increasingly becoming apparent that Israeli occupation of the Golan and Palestinian territories was not being prioritized in the same way as the Egyptian-Israeli track. Asad stated in an interview with *Al-Ahram* that the US position “has not yet reached the extent that is required and called for by a serious endeavour to contribute to the realization of a just peace.”²⁰ Asad sought to make it clear that while impending Syrian visits to the United States would be seeking to further economic bilateral relations between the two states, Syria’s priorities remained the freeing of occupied Arab lands and the situation of the Palestinians.²¹ Asad also wanted to keep the door of renewed hostilities open, despite the Disengagement Agreement later in May, as a threat against Israeli prevarication at the Geneva conference. The true extent of Syrian dissatisfaction with the Americans was expressed by Zakaria Ismail, the most senior government member involved in US-Syrian communication in this period, who intimated that the Syrians had accepted the October cease-fire and handed over the list of Israeli prisoners “without having received anything in exchange.”²² This reflects the growing dissatisfaction felt by the Syrians toward the unfolding peace process and toward the lack of US repayment of their efforts.

By September 1974, these strains were already beginning to show and were to be raised by Khaddam during his visit to Washington. The principal interest in his visit was to query the lack of further progress on Israeli withdrawal and the situation of the Palestinians. His talking points included the following:²³ (1) why Israel had done so little to withdraw from the Golan and Palestinian territories that it occupied in 1967, and did the United States raise this with Yitzhak Rabin on his recent visit to the United States? (2) Syria was anxious about the Egyptians “tak[ing] the lead alone” and wished to see greater progress on the Syrian, Jordanian, and Palestinian fronts—if not, then Syria was prepared to withdraw from negotiations. (3) Even with Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank (on the Jordanian front), Syria’s acceptance of this would depend on the extent to which Palestinian interests were taken into account. (4) Syria would campaign for a greater role of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and representation of the Palestinians at the Geneva conference. (5) Syria would complain about the infringement of Syrian sovereignty by the presence of UNDOF, insisting that they stick to their remit of observation only.

But the most significant of the complaints raised related to what Syria felt were violations of the Disengagement Agreement committed by Israel. These included the following: the arrest of three Syrian civilians by Israeli forces in the Syrian village of Haddas, which the Israelis were supposed

to evacuate on June 19; continued Israeli military presence, contrary to the agreement, in the Abu Zahab, Aakkacha, and Abbas hills south of Quneitra; Israeli military operations on Abu Nada hill overlooking Quneitra; Israeli construction of antitank bunkers and laying of mines and barbed wire in the evacuated area; and Israeli obstruction of engineering work to clear the separation zone of mines, thus preventing the return of civilians into the area.

To all these queries and concerns from the Syrians, the United States had the following responses: (1) in relation to the stalling over Golan withdrawal, the United States felt that “a first stage of negotiations on the Jordanian front, as well as a further round of disengagement on the Egyptian front are necessary before we can proceed with a next step on the Syrian front,” and that further talks on the latter were “politically impossible” at that time; (2) with regard to Egypt, the United States hoped to persuade Syria as to the benefit of letting Egyptian-Israeli talks to “proceed at their own pace,” portraying it as a separate issue to wider negotiations; (3) further talks were planned on the Jordanian-Israeli track, but not intended to address the situation of the Palestinians—the extent to which the latter could be taken into account depended on what Israel was willing to live with and allow; (4) a greater role for the PLO could jeopardize Israeli participation, and therefore Syria should not push for this; (5) UNDOF was not just an observer force, contrary to the Syrians’ understanding, but had the right to inspect civilian and military personnel entering the area, even though the area in question had been evacuated by Israel and technically was Syrian territory. This level of inspection of all parties was necessary for Israeli confidence in the disengagement process.

Finally, to Syria’s great annoyance, the Israeli violations they had listed were almost all dismissed by the United States as activities that did not “appear to be violations of the Disengagement Agreement.” The Israeli actions highlighted by Damascus were judged to have been established or taken place before the Disengagement Agreement was signed (such as the arrests or Israel’s military presence in the hills around Quneitra); could not be validated based on Israeli assurances to the contrary (such as the military operations and obstruction of engineering work); or were technically permitted under the terms of the agreement because boundary lines were not clear and could be interpreted differently by different parties (which effectively covered all of Israel’s military operations and activities).²⁴ For Syria, any level of compromise or agreement carried grave risks for the stability of the regime, and yet they persevered with disengagement with the assurances that both sides were being made to compromise—but where they found Israel to be flouting the terms, the United States refused to take any action, describing the violations as mere “irritants.”²⁵

The above developments, occurring during a period when Damascus was in fact attempting to bridge the divide between itself and the United States and demonstrate conciliatory gestures, contributed to an increasing suspicion that none of those gestures were bearing any fruits. Yes, Syria had cooperated with the Disengagement Agreement and established greater ties with the United States, but this had been conditional on the fulfillment of certain terms, or at least signs that both mediator and enemy parties were considering them seriously. The continued postponement in addressing those terms were increasingly suspected as empty promises to subdue the Syrians enough to enable the Egyptian and Jordanian settlements to progress without hindrance—these suspicions were close to the truth, as reflected by private comments made by the State Department and by Kissinger in his diaries.²⁶ Thus, Syria's rhetoric increasingly became less conciliatory and more threatening, as the short period of rapprochement began to unravel in the year of 1974, coinciding with the new presidency of Gerald Ford in the United States.

However, this change was not merely in relation to Syria's increasing disillusionment with its own prospects in the negotiation process, but was also strongly related to an exacerbation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian fedayeen. This was a trend notable from the previous decade, when deterioration in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had a direct and significant impact on Syria's dispute with Israel, and in turn its relations with the United States. Early in March 1974, in response to inflammatory remarks made by Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Asad told the Syrian press:

The war is not over. It will not be over unless the occupied Arab land is liberated in full and unless the Pal[estinian] people's rights are restored in full. . . . This means that in this country, we must wage a political struggle while maintaining our full military preparedness . . .

At a time when the Israeli PM insists that the Golan is a part of Israel, we deem it useful to remind . . . Israeli officials that Palestine is not only a part of the Arab homeland but a basic part of Southern Syria.²⁷

Later, Khaddam reiterated Asad's words by stating:

Syria conditions any agreement for disengagement . . . on the evacuation by Israel of all Arab territory occupied since 1967 and the recognition of the national rights of the Pal[estinian] people . . . disengagement of forces is only a step. Those who think it is a final solution are badly mistaken.²⁸

A couple of months after these exchanges, there was heavy shelling between Israel and Syria, with large numbers of Syrian casualties—at the same

time, the United States was considering a \$2.2 billion emergency assistance to cover the costs of Israel's military equipment.²⁹ Furthermore, in May, Israeli-Palestinian tensions also flared into fighting. Palestinian fedayeen were reported by the United States to have attacked a teenage campsite in Ma'alot on May 15, 1974, and against "other innocent civilians" in the area. Kissinger demanded that all governments condemn such actions—Syria did not.³⁰ Following this incident, Israel carried out air attacks in Lebanon, killing many civilians. The United States, however, responded not by condemning Israel, but rather by describing the attacks as being part of a "cycle of violence" and entreating all parties to "redouble their efforts for a just and lasting peace." Washington was accused of showing a much "milder" reaction to Israel's air attacks than the Ma'alot attacks, to which the United States responded: "if [the] first action had not occurred, obviously the second would not have taken place."³¹ These developments further served to entrench Syria's existing skepticism over the US role as mediators, as well as reigniting its defense of the Palestinians and pushing it further away from a settlement with Israel.

Thus, after these events, Syria's ideological rhetoric and actions increased. At the Arab League summit in Rabat in October, Syria was the most vocal advocate of the PLO and rallied enough support to get the PLO formally recognized as the representatives of the Palestinians by all the other states present.³² Furthermore, true to its threats at the start of negotiations, Syria ultimately refused to participate in the Geneva conference and tried to rally other states around them. Syria's disillusionment had also been compounded by the increasing divergence of Egypt from the collective Arab cause.

Egypt "Defects"

Thus far, the chapter has addressed the US and Syrian positions in relation to the Arab-Israeli negotiations, and how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had a clear impact on the respective policies and relations between Damascus and Washington. Another crucial factor that needs to be addressed at this stage is the role of Egypt. Egypt offers an important comparison that can be used to explain Syria's poor relations with the United States. How is it that Egypt could shift from being a champion of Arab nationalism, antagonist of Israel, and opponent of American policy in the Middle East, to becoming a key ally of the United States and being considered as a partner by Israel in any "peace process"? Investigating this change more closely in turn helps in understanding why Syria did *not* follow Egypt's example, despite predictions by policy-makers and academics alike. The roots of the divergence between Syria and Egypt can be

traced further back during Nasser's leadership, but the major developments occurred during the period of negotiations after the 1973 war.

The grounds for suspicion and discord were laid after Sadat agreed to a cease-fire without consulting Asad.³³ This was exacerbated by Egypt's increased compliance with American and Israeli demands, and a tendency to pursue Egyptian interests unilaterally without seemingly considering the ramifications for other parties in the conflict or using its influence to seek solutions for others, in contrast to Syria's policy and rhetoric as exemplified above. A key explanation for this is Syria's continued adherence to ideological principles, and Egypt's abandonment of them. This had implications for their respective, and eventually very different, relations with the United States.

Egypt was aware that it would face problems if it agreed to a full peace treaty with Israel, but saw that these were necessary sacrifices for the sake of stability on the Israeli-Egyptian front. However, such a peace would have ramifications not only for Egypt but for the other parties too—for Egypt was planning to vote against allowing the PLO to represent the Palestinians at the Geneva conference or any subsequent negotiations. It was not only Egypt that was willing to drop the Palestinian cause; Jordan, it was reported, was "exceedingly pleased and gratified" about Egypt's decision,³⁴ fearing greater Palestinian influence and demands in Jordan. But unlike Egypt, Jordan was not yet ready to take the lead in any treaty with Israel and cutting off of the Palestinians.³⁵ Syria's position can thus be seen in marked contrast to both Egyptian and Jordanian compliance with the United States and ambivalence toward the Palestinians.

Indeed, Sadat's willingness to comply was acknowledged by the United States. Having visited the three Arab leaders, Kissinger reported:

Sadat [is] trying to figure out how he can manage the upcoming October 26 Arab summit so that he is free to undertake Egyptian-Israeli negotiations if he so wishes; a volatile and passionate Asad, [is] firm against piecemeal agreements and seeking to prevent a separate Egyptian-Israeli negotiation; and a worried Hussein . . . will insist he, and not the PLO, be supported at the Summit by his Arab colleagues as the negotiator for the return of the West Bank, but ready to remain aloof from the negotiating process if the Arabs support the PLO.³⁶

In stark contrast with Syria, there were no concerns about Sadat's acquiescence with the United States; there were few fears by this stage that Sadat would not accept Israel's terms of withdrawal in the Sinai. Rather, the greatest concern was that Sadat would do so far too willingly, thereby greatly weakening his own credibility in the region to such an extent that it would

in fact hurt US interests.³⁷ The Americans were not the only ones with such fears. Such was Sadat's keenness and satisfaction with Israel's terms that he outlined he was already prepared to go forward with the second stage of disengagement even without consolidation of the first stage. At this stage there was disquiet from Egypt's own ranks. Egypt's foreign minister Ismail Fahmi made it known that he had serious doubts "about the feasibility" of what Sadat had agreed to; he was worried about not just trouble from Palestinians, but even a potential coup inside Egypt. So extreme did he view Sadat's acquiescence that he refused to participate in future discussions on greater rapprochement with Israel.³⁸

The key question to ask at this point is whether Egypt was selling itself short in future negotiations by being so open to compromise; what bargaining power or leverage did it retain with such open displays of agreement with Israel, and notably few demands of its own? Particularly given the centrality of Egypt's position with the negotiating parties, including the United States and Israel, one might note that Egypt had far greater scope to demand greater concessions from Israel for itself and on behalf of its Arab counterpart—an observation that was not lost on Syria. Indeed, one outcome of Egypt's flexibility was arguably an increased boldness on the part of Israel—for there were signs that Egypt's compliance was not being reciprocated by Israel, which set ever higher demands in its favor in negotiations. Kissinger himself noted the imbalance in agreed concessions, stating:

You can get an idea of the magnitude of the Israeli starting demands when I tell you that for withdrawal of somewhere between 30 to 50 kilometers from their present line on the Sinai, they want not only a commitment of Egyptian non-belligerency, but they want assurance there will not be a third phase negotiation for at least five years.³⁹

Once again, in contrast to Egypt's willingness to cooperate and pursue a separate peace, Kissinger on the same trip to the region had five grueling hours of talks with Asad, who was described throughout this time as being "firm" in his insistence that separate talks should not be pursued, and that he would try to persuade the conference of this view too. Asad made it clear that he did not want Syria to be isolated, but it was "his conviction that through a united Arab front there is strength and that the goal must be a total Israeli withdrawal to the '67 borders, and the rights of the Palestinians restored through the PLO."⁴⁰

There is much literature arguing that Syria gave up on an ideological agenda to follow Egypt's example, focusing on self-interest,⁴¹ so it is important to note that in fact Asad did not at any stage in private talks with the

United States abandon (a) his call for peace to be pursued *on all fronts*, and (b) his insistence on retaining the right to engage in diplomacy without giving up the right to go to war. This for the Syrians was a crucial bargaining tool, without which advantage would be handed over to Israel. Therefore, by this stage, Asad had a “deep suspicion of the Egyptians” as Asad realized that Sadat might be willing to “go ahead with the Israelis on his own.”⁴² Meanwhile, he was also opposed to a Jordanian-Israeli agreement as it excluded the Palestinians.⁴³ This indicates that Syrian divergence with Egypt’s closer links with Israel and the United States was not merely on the basis of Syria’s interests but also due to ideological principles concerning the region.

Agreements in Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement

What then were the terms that Egypt agreed to, which laid the foundations for the momentous truce between Egypt and Israel in 1979, and simultaneously entrenched Syria’s isolation? First, it is worth noting that Sadat was the first Arab leader to start direct bilateral talks with Israel and to pursue a second stage of disengagement, negotiated in the UN zone in Sinai. Second, the Disengagement Agreement was not only of military but, crucially, also of political significance.

Before negotiations could begin, Egypt set out the following terms: that any demarcation line should be secure from the other side’s troops; that the Disengagement Agreement should not give either side military advantage; that there should be an equal balance of Egyptian and Israeli troops in the Sinai, which would require more Egyptian forces—particular given the likelihood of hostile reaction to Suez access for Israel; that the buffer zones be wide enough to avoid clashes and give the Egyptian people security; and that there should be freedom of movement for Egyptians in Gaza and Sinai.⁴⁴

Despite the concessions, and the limited nature of Egypt’s demands, Israel still refused to move forward without further reassurances on the following terms. Notably, Israel’s demands moved beyond military issues into the political arena. Furthermore, while Egypt’s conditions were restricted to bilateral territorial issues, Israel’s demands had far wider implications for the region and other Arab parties, and were not of a bilateral nature only. The new prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, led the negotiating team for Israel and stated the following:

1. Substantial Israeli withdrawal east of the passes was “out of the question,” and Israel was not prepared to make any concessions on

territory in the Sinai and in the oil fields. This would only be agreed to if Sadat made a public commitment to nonbelligerence, even while Arab territory was in effect still occupied.

2. Rabin demanded a public Egyptian commitment not to make war against Israel.
3. Assurances that UN forces would not be removed from the Sinai, plus the establishment of joint committees with supervision teams to oversee the execution of agreement.
4. Despite demands for nonbelligerency from Egypt, Israel still wanted an interim agreement, so as to delay the time of full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai.
5. Freedom of navigation on high seas, straits, and waterways, plus freedom of flights over them, plus nonrestriction on ships, planes, or travelers who previously transited in the other party's territory.
6. Open bridges (for tourists, family visits, trading goods).
7. Cessation of anti-Israel diplomatic pressures in other countries and international bodies.⁴⁵

Although the Egyptian military had wanted Egyptian forces east of the passes, with full Israeli withdrawal from that zone, Sadat gave way, allowing Israel to remain in the east zone, and for Egypt to only go up to the existing Israeli line, west of the passes. Israel also insisted that lightly armed Israeli forces should control the main north-south road in the Sinai and that its main forces should be stationed east of the Sinai's Mitla and Giddi passes beyond Egypt's artillery range.⁴⁶ While Sadat had consistently refused this in the first Disengagement Agreement, he accepted this in the second stage of the agreement (also known as Sinai II). Moreover, he agreed to allow unrestricted passage for Israeli cargo in the Suez Canal, and an end to hostile propaganda and boycotts against both Israel and the United States.⁴⁷ Unable to agree fully on Israel's demands for only an interim agreement and in order to make some progress, Sadat instead gave oral assurances that if Syria attacked Israel, Egypt would not join.⁴⁸ And while he did not officially concede to a nonbelligerency pact, he accepted it in all but name by agreeing to the non-use of force⁴⁹ even when the line of Israeli withdrawal had not been confirmed at all. Furthermore, Sadat was not intending to tell his Arab partners of what he was planning at the Arab summit on October 24, 1974.⁵⁰ He did not want it known that he was advancing in both political and military talks with Israel. That this was an extraordinary and controversial move by Sadat therefore can be ascertained from the secrecy with which he was operating.

With the final agreement of both sides' terms, the second stage of disengagement was finally formalized on September 4, 1975, in Geneva.

As a result of this, a further agreement was yet signed between the United States and Israel because

The United States recognizes that the Israel interim agreement with Egypt, entailing the withdrawal from highly important strategic and economic assets in Sinai, constitutes an act of great significance on Israel's part in the pursuit of final peace. It elicits full US support.⁵¹

This came despite the fact that Israel's demands on Egypt had been greater. The great risks that Cairo had taken in its agreements were also not yet acknowledged publicly by Washington, and certainly no such promise of "full US support" for Egypt would yet materialize. This would come only after Egypt signed the full peace treaty, thus further emphasizing the fact that Egypt was taking far-reaching action without yet securing greater financial or diplomatic rewards as might have been expected. In contrast, the United States was constantly providing Israel with further incentives to garner any compromise at all. Washington agreed to the following, in effect to reward Israel for its cooperation:

- Ongoing American commitment to Israel's military.
- A guarantee of full quantity of oil for Israel's economy—that extra amount being estimated at 450 million dollars annually.
- The United States would enter joint ventures with Israel to construct oil storage facilities.
- For a fixed number of years, the US government would not expect Israel to withdraw from any new territory in the Sinai.
- Additionally Egypt would not seek further withdrawal in that time.
- The United States secured assurances from Egypt that the Disengagement Agreement was not conditional on "any act or development in the relations between Israel and other Arab states," that it would not initiate military action against Israel, nor support other states' action.
- And the United States would ensure that all Egyptian boycotts, and anti-Israel propaganda would cease.⁵²

Crucially, two further promises made by the United States involved the Syrians: Washington guaranteed that it would not expect Israel to negotiate an interim agreement with Syria that required further withdrawal from the Golan Heights; and that it would try to persuade Syria to agree to an extension of UNDOF's mandate in the Golan.⁵³ What is clear from this is that the United States was trading guarantees *against* progress on a Syrian-Israeli settlement in order to persuade Israel to agree to a settlement with Egypt. Syrian demands in the negotiations were thus sacrificed with ease, exposing Washington's ambivalence toward them.

Although Egypt had already accepted a wide range of terms under the agreement, they were expected to undertake yet another set of guarantees to placate Israel, and which were all based on US-Israeli demands and had major implications. Egypt did not question the terms but again proved to be acquiescent. These promises included the following:

1. Not to permit training, planning, and organizing of Palestinian terrorist activities against Israel.
2. To oppose terror activities of all kinds, including kidnappings, hijackings, threats from groups in third-country territories—Egypt must give public and official opposition to such acts. It could not grant asylum to perpetrators either.
3. To prohibit the advocating of terrorism, guerrilla action, or a “popular war” as a means of conducting warfare against Israel or as an instrument to advance political goals against Israel in official pronouncements or government media.
4. To support Jordan in peace negotiations and not obstruct talks between Jordan and Israel.⁵⁴

Implications of Egypt's Agreements for Syria and Arab Relations

Before such agreements were made, Syria's prospects of a favorable settlement were already looking bleak. President Ford, having assumed leadership during a stalemate in the Syrian negotiations, found himself to be “in a complicated way,” because the trajectory of talks had been so disproportionately in favor of Israel that the United States now had to maintain the semblance of equal bargaining—thus, Ford could not give outright assurances to the Israelis that he would not raise and press the Syrian matter, but there was a tacit acceptance that he would not.⁵⁵ This reflected the existing deadlock on the Syrian front, as it had become clear that Israel was not willing to concede any further land on the Golan Heights while Syria was demanding full withdrawal. This raised Syria's skepticism over the utility of talks; the United States admitted that Rabin “[had] been inconsistent” during talks. At one stage, he had stated that he was ready to look at an interim agreement based only on *cosmetic changes*, but in the autumn he agreed to consider the possibility of unilateral Israeli steps toward withdrawal, with follow-up discussions with Syria at the Geneva conference.⁵⁶

However, while Syria's prospects were already bleak, Egypt's decisions further relegated the importance of Syria in negotiations and put the Golan Heights and the Palestinians' plight on the back burner.⁵⁷ First, any efforts by the Syrians and Palestinians were undermined by the second stage of Egyptian-Israeli disengagement. Egypt's willingness to accept Israel's demands put greater pressure on Damascus to move along at the same

pace, but also to undermine Syria's demands as unrealistic and intransigent. Those demands were no longer seen as representing a unified Arab position that had to be negotiated but rather one that was now marginal and appeared to be obstructing the cause for "peace." The agreement stipulated that both parties could not resort to "the threat or use of force against Israel/Egypt and to settle all disputes through negotiations and other peaceful means"⁵⁸—a military solution was thus ruled out. With the threat of war with Egypt taken off the agenda, it became less important for Israel to negotiate with the other parties, and this gave Israel greater flexibility to exercise and enhance its power in the region.

Second, having agreed separately with Egypt to withdraw from the Sinai, Israel claimed that any further withdrawal from other Arab territories would jeopardize Israeli security, and it was therefore not prepared to move negotiations forward on other fronts. Israel's leadership argued that the Knesset did not want Israel to talk to Syria and therefore the leaders had no mandate to do so.⁵⁹ Had Egypt not acted unilaterally and had it set conditions for Israeli withdrawal from other fronts, it may well have been more difficult for Israel to use its agreement with Egypt to justify its non-cooperation with other parties.

Third, the Disengagement Agreement with Egypt also gave Israel a further pretext to place further demands and conditions on the United States. Thus, in return for its acceptance of the agreement, Israel extracted guarantees from the United States: to supply oil and aid, and that "should Israel take military action as a result of an Egyptian violation of the Agreement or any of its attachments, the US [government], if it agrees that such action is reasonable, will lend Israel material and diplomatic support."⁶⁰ Furthermore, if *any* world power threatened Israel, its security or sovereignty, the United States promised to lend support, and it agreed to ensure that the Israeli-Egyptian agreement *was not contingent on any other agreement with other Arab states*. Significantly for Syria, Israel set the condition that the United States would not press Rabin to change his position on an Israeli-Syrian agreement.

Egyptian-Syrian Relations Deteriorate and Pressure on Syria

By September 1975, relations deteriorated significantly between Syria and Egypt as a result of the widespread view that Egypt had betrayed its Arab partners and had conceded too much to Israel and the United States: in September, the Egyptian embassy in Damascus was attacked. Egyptian foreign minister Fahmy responded that if such an attack happened again, he would order the destruction of the Syrian embassy in Cairo.⁶¹ The

attack was perpetrated by 100–150 members of Rifaat Asad's special forces dressed in civilian clothes—Syrian authorities did warn the Egyptians that a demonstration was planned, and later claimed the rogue rioters had got into the embassy through the back. Cairo issued an ultimatum to Damascus that the Egyptian ambassador would be withdrawn if the anti-Egypt tactics were not stopped.⁶²

Egypt's precarious position was made worse because Israel continued to praise Sadat and compare him with other Arabs' belligerency. This in fact weakened Sadat and led to him being described by many as a traitor. Sadat was put in an unwinnable situation—the United States reported that he did not want to admit to his agreements with Israel in public, but at the same time in “protesting his innocence” against the accusations of collusion with Israel, he would be accused by Israel of renegeing against his agreement not to engage in anti-Israel propaganda.⁶³ It was said that Egypt expected sharp criticism from the Palestinians, but that the “unexpected virulence of Syrian reaction is upsetting. As is [. . . the] concomitant deafening silence of even friendly Arab states.”⁶⁴ According to reports, Sadat was calling his foreign minister Fahmi every day to ask him “what can be done to reassure and calm the Syrians down.”⁶⁵

Despite his dismay at these attacks, Sadat seemingly had few answers to the charges coming from both Syria and Israel (described by the United States as “strange bedfellows” on this occasion) that the Egyptian front was now frozen, thus ending the state of war “practically and contractually.” Syria was also furious that Sadat failed to mention other Arab territories or the Palestinian people in his agreement, had introduced “armed US intelligence agents” into Arab territory, and had rewarded “Israeli extortion with colossal amounts of US aid.” Sadat admitted to the United States that he and his advisors had anticipated these criticisms, but had hoped “Damascus at least would not, repeat not, air them publicly.”⁶⁶

Despite praising Sadat's courage publicly, the United States recognized in private that Sadat did not get what he had initially wanted from negotiations, and had conceded more than he and his advisors thought was politically safe. Such was the level of antipathy toward Sadat, and the unpopularity directed toward Egypt, that the following was noted: “That the GOE [Government of Egypt] would shed no tears at Sadat's disappearance is assumed here . . .”⁶⁷

Egypt's Motivations

Why then did Egypt act so readily? While Egypt's decisions and actions have been outlined, the reasons behind them now need greater analysis.

This in turn will help to explain why Syria did not pursue the same path. Egypt's decision was viewed even by its supporters as extraordinary—in trying to assess the reasons behind its risky decision, Washington provided a number of explanations:

- (i) First, Sadat had taken a gamble in shifting his reliance from the Soviet Union to the United States, and his cooperation with Israel was intensely unpopular. He was highly conscious of his critics—he was stung by the criticisms leveled at his decisions and saw this as his last real chance to prove his strategy was working, and had not “hopelessly stalled,” as his critics were charging.⁶⁸ For 18 months Sadat was unable to get movement on the Israeli front and was beginning to lose support even among those who initially backed an agreement. Thus, *any* opportunity at a settlement was deemed better than none—it was a case of “now or never” for Sadat.⁶⁹ It should be noted that Asad too was under pressure to prove that cooperation with the United States would lead to results, but unlike Sadat, who got deeper into concessions in order to save face, Asad walked away from negotiations.
- (ii) Sadat, however, felt he could not follow Asad's example. The United States argued that he knew Egypt could not “win” a war, undermining the value of keeping the option of war open as Syria preferred. Egypt could still have gained from a limited war, which might have enabled it to take back the Mitla and Giddi passes. But Sadat also knew that with such an act Egypt would lose US support. He could not risk this, especially having alienated the Soviet Union, which refused to participate in the Geneva ceremony to sign the agreements; the loss of Soviet support was already placing economic pressures on Egypt, and the United States needed to be kept on its side to compensate for this.⁷⁰ Having failed to secure the passes or oil fields from Israel, American support was one of the few gains Sadat could use to justify his controversial policy and argue it was working—if this too was jeopardized, it would be a “crushing admission that his policy was bankrupt.”⁷¹
- (iii) The United States also argued that Sadat was duped by the mystique of the Free Officers in 1952, believing that the Arab world's “respect for his person and that of his old comrades is immutable.”⁷² Sadat's skeptical foreign minister Fahmi went as far as to claim that “this is [the] sole important reason that Sadat nerved himself to sign [a] ‘bad’ agreement . . . now these premises have proven dramatically untrue, [the] president is in some state of agitation.”⁷³
- (iv) Furthermore, the United States argued that Sadat was impressed with the notion that a disengagement involving the first case of

Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory would be brought about by negotiations and not war—Sadat wanted to construct this as a symbolic victory for his and Egypt's legacy, in which Egypt helped to initiate the beginning of a peace process after decades of conflict.⁷⁴

- (v) Despite widespread unpopularity, there were some who did support Sadat's decisions—this provided him with enough encouragement to pursue an agreement with Israel and to agree to so many concessions. Among these were the Saudi regime, which, the United States argued, was pivotal in persuading Sadat; the United States argued that many Egyptians were also “in [the] mood to accept even [a] ‘bad’ Disengagement Agreement,” despite the apparent abandonment of ideology that it represented—they argued that businessmen wanted stability, while the army was aware of the “severe disadvantages” it faced if it continued on a war footing. War fatigue and a yearning for economic improvement were cited as key motivations for Egypt's rapprochement.⁷⁵ There were of course many other sections of Egypt's population that were excluded from the US analysis here, as was borne out so dramatically on October 6, 1981, when Sadat was assassinated.
- (vi) Finally, more pressing realities also impacted Sadat's decision—he was aware that Egypt was militarily weak and vulnerable at this time. He had hoped that through this agreement he had sealed his borders against Israeli attacks. He also saw it as opening up the chance of obtaining supplies from western sources, which had previously been withheld.⁷⁶

Thus, the following reasons—Egypt's economic and military stagnation; support from business elites and conservative Arab neighbors; the prestige of initiating peace; the need to stave off criticism and produce something after two years of talks and a costly war; and fear of losing newfound US support—explain why Sadat agreed to sign the agreement, with incomplete Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and a range of far-reaching Egyptian concessions in the military and political realm. For all their plaudits, even the United States described his actions as a “*faute de mieux*.”⁷⁷

While much of the literature highlights, even lauds, Sadat for his pragmatism in turning his back on ideological principles, indicating that it was a mark of a mature state,⁷⁸ documents reveal the high level of concern held not only by insiders in the Egyptian government but also in Washington, which feared that Sadat had gone too far and acted too hastily in discarding popular opinion and altering Egypt's foreign policy so dramatically. Of course, Sadat knew the risks were high, but he seemed unprepared for the level of opposition he was to face.

To understand this opposition, it should be noted that he had left himself open to attack on almost every traditional principle of Arab nationalist philosophy: having expelled the Soviets, he had invited the Americans to play an even greater role in the region, thus seeming to facilitate the reintroduction to the area of superpower “imperialists”; he had agreed to the *de facto* suspension of the state of belligerency against Israel, which had been the main ideological driving force after decolonization—in doing so, Sadat was seen to be violating the basic tenet of Arab solidarity, in effect accepting the status quo in the region when he had been unable to get a public and firm determination from the United States to seek Israel’s immediate pullback from the Golan; and he had “nothing to offer the Palestinians” except a statement that he had urged dialogue with them.⁷⁹ The following assessment from the US State Department sums up Egypt’s predicament accurately: “In short, Sadat will be hard-pressed to refute charges that his is a self-seeking ‘Egypt first’ policy which flies in the face of Arab nationalist principles of [the] 1952 revolution.”⁸⁰

The shift, or as some called it “defection,” by Egypt was completed over the following years, culminating in a formal peace treaty with Israel on March 26, 1979. The symbolic impact of the turnaround had been made all the greater with Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1977, followed by a series of foreign aid agreements with the United States, producing a solid alliance that would last for decades. As a result, Egypt benefited from close to \$2 billion of US aid every year and was given a central role in the “peace process” and other regional affairs. While it is cited as an example of Egypt giving up ideology for pragmatic self-interest, there are important ways in which this assessment comes into question.

First, it strongly went against popular opinion to such an extent that it placed the government at risk. Sadat himself paid the ultimate price when he was assassinated by gunmen on October 6, 1981. Both the controversial pro-American policy and the regime remained intact after Hosni Mubarak came to power, but at the expense of its reputation and popular leadership that Egypt had enjoyed prior to the truce with Israel.⁸¹ Second, the country as a whole did not benefit as much as was hoped in terms of development and economic advancement: US aid barely trickled down to lower levels of society, as poverty levels increased over the decades. And finally, the region’s problems were not resolved by Egypt’s actions—they did not produce the domino effect as was expected: Israel still faced hostility and insecurity, and indeed it could be argued that the marginalization of Israel’s opponents and Egypt’s apparent kowtowing to US policy increased radicalism in the region. Egypt’s “self-interest” contributed to the region’s problems rather than resolve them.

If pragmatism is associated with efficiency and strategic prowess, then the outcomes of Sadat's policy fell short. Moreover, Sadat's policy was seen even by contemporaries as idealistic, rather than pragmatic. His expectations in Washington's ability to deliver concessions from Israel if the Arabs complied, and his granting of concessions before these were reciprocated by Israel,⁸² exposed naïveté in negotiation skills or even recklessness. Finally, as analyzed above, Sadat's policy was not entirely the result of rational decision-making, but rather there was a mixture of hubris and desperation in his motives. From the anger shown by his ministers and Sadat's failure to consider the extent of public opposition that might be stoked by his policies, it is evident that there was little collective decision-making and poor intelligence of popular opinion at the heart of the regime.

Conclusion

In two decades' time from these events, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was to claim that a private letter given by President Ford to Rabin during the disengagement talks stipulated that the United States would *not* challenge Israel about its continued occupation of the Golan Heights.⁸³ Shamir argued that this letter laid the parameters for future talks and justified Israel's non-cooperation over the Golan Heights. Such a letter would indeed be highly controversial, given that it directly contradicted Washington's public rhetoric, not least to the Syrians, that it was acting as a neutral mediator and was working on the basis of UN resolutions stipulating withdrawal. However, the following archival evidence shows that Shamir's claims were accurate, as Kissinger had recorded the content of a letter from Ford to Rabin that matches the wording of the very note Shamir showed to Secretary Baker in 1991:

The US will support the position that an overall settlement with Syria in the framework of a peace agreement must include effective arrangements to assure Israeli security from attack from the Golan Heights. The US appreciates fully and gives great weight to Israel's view that any peace agreement with Syria must be predicated on Israeli remaining on the Golan Heights. The US is prepared to support this position if other arrangements which might prove feasible are not, in the US judgement, of comparable effectiveness in protecting Israel's survival and security, to which the US is fully committed.⁸⁴

Syria, of course, was ignorant of any such promises made by the United States to Israel. As long as this secret arrangement between Israel and the United States continued, the premise of any current or future negotiations

between Syria and Israel was flawed. Meanwhile, this demonstrates that the United States was not acting in an even-handed way with the Syrians and in fact helped to predetermine a negative outcome in Syrian-Israel negotiations, and thereby US-Syrian relations.

And indeed the United States had already laid the foundations for this one-sided policy prior to this private communication. The State Department had been more receptive of Syria's concessions and more genuine in wanting to reach a comprehensive settlement including Syria. But whatever they had expected from the talks, they became somewhat irrelevant to the negotiation process. It largely came to be dictated on the American side through the president's office and especially by Kissinger—the sidelining of the State Department allowed Kissinger to wield a great deal of influence.

Independent of the fact that the American public was in favor of Israel with the danger of an anti-Arab backlash if the administration were seen to do too much for Arabs,⁸⁵ Kissinger's own memoirs show that he had no intention to push for the fulfillment of Resolution 242, which stipulated Israel withdraw from all Arab land occupied in 1967.⁸⁶ Kissinger always consulted with Israel before talking to the Arabs, thereby ensuring that Israeli demands were the starting point of any negotiations; moreover, there were times when Kissinger actively discouraged Israel from moving too quickly in negotiations in case it made Israel "look weak"—the United States played a role therefore in supporting Israel's inflexibility.⁸⁷ Kissinger also acknowledged that he wanted to make Arabs learn the lesson of the "impossibility" of achieving anything through military means.⁸⁸ The Arabs' hand had been weakened therefore well before negotiations even started.

To answer the questions Part III had begun with, Washington had already prepared the ground for their preferred outcome, which was a piecemeal settlement that excluded the Syrians and the Palestinians—the United States proved not to be a neutral mediator but rather it actively avoided pursuing Syrian and Palestinian demands for fear of upsetting Israel and jeopardizing the Egyptian and Jordanian negotiations. Thus, its relationship with Israel—not just at the diplomatic level but also faced with pro-Israeli public opinion domestically—did hinder a more just and comprehensive settlement that reflected the goals of all the parties. Moreover, there was evidence to show that the United States held deep-seated perceptions and assumptions about the Syrians, which meant that their track in negotiations was given low priority to begin with. Such was their conviction that Syria's radicalism and intransigence would not result in a settlement that they merely saw the Syrians in an instrumental light to make the path smoother for the other parties—hardly conducive to a successful outcome on the Syrian-Israeli front.

To what extent, then, were American perceptions of Syria accurate? Syria's position was supported by UN resolutions 242 and 338; in legal terms, their demands were neither unrealistic nor unjustified. In this light, it would be difficult to argue that Syria was being obstructionist because it maintained its basic demand for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory—the logic of which would mean that Syria would have to concede territory to Israel, occupied in contravention of the Geneva Convention, in order to be rid of the obstructionist label. Thus, to describe Syria's actions as obstructionist in this case is not warranted.

In terms of the view that Syria was intransigent and inflexible, there is some accuracy to suggest that Syria was the most consistent in its demands and the least willing to sacrifice its starting terms in negotiations. But again, it would be difficult to see what principles could have been sacrificed when their demands for withdrawal, though crucial, were also very basic. Moreover, it was not the case that Syria was entirely unwilling to negotiate any terms or agree to an interim arrangement that favored Israel more—their acceptance of the Disengagement Agreement and willingness to allow temporary territorial concessions demonstrated that they were a party that one could bargain with. In fact, Israel was just as unwilling to concede its wartime advantages as the Arab parties, if not more, while the inducements needed to persuade it to even engage in talks were always far greater than any offered to the Arabs. There were a number of principles that Israel was not willing to concede—some of these were for deep-seated ideological reasons and some were due to public pressure. In that sense, Israel shares more similarities with Syria than does Egypt, with whom Syria is usually compared, because Syria similarly would not sacrifice key ideological principles—demands for a comprehensive settlement, opposition to Israel, and a united Arab front—even in the face of financial, military, and political incentives. The regime's adherence to Arab nationalism was both personal and historical, but it was all the more pressing and indispensable because of popular opinion.

Sadat's role was important, but he did not shape the nascent peace process as boldly as he hoped. He ended up facilitating the outcome desired by Washington (so willingly at times that even they were surprised), but his actions also weakened the Arabs' strength to negotiate and to retain leverage. Crucially, his actions gave the separate-peace initiative the legitimacy needed: that of having Arab support. The status quo of Israeli occupation of other Arab lands was therefore solidified with the removal of a key challenger. Sadat could pursue this path by abandoning ideology, which he saw as intangible and unrealistic, and by opting for the self-help route. And yet his decisions were not only motivated by self-interest for Egypt but they were also influenced by a combination of idealism, desperation, need

for recognition, and hubris (particularly in underestimating the level of opposition his policies would evoke).

Given the nonrational motives at play, the pragmatism that is often associated with Sadat's policy is therefore questionable. Syria, on the other hand, though retaining its ideological principles, also demonstrated caution and realism with regard to the outcomes of the negotiations, and a greater awareness of (a) the public mood; (b) its own limitations, both domestically and internationally; and (c) the strategies and goals of its opponents. Thus, conversely, Syria's policy was ideological in substance, and pragmatic in its calculations and implementation. It was thus both these approaches that prevented Syria from following Egypt in signing a truce with Israel and forming an alliance with the United States.

Notes

1. Briefing paper, Syria's position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference. File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180 Also see: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot #74D416, Box 182.
2. Briefing paper, Syria's position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Box 180; Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 182.
3. Memo of conversation, meeting between Kissinger and Vice Foreign Minister to Syria, Ismail, November 2, 1973, Briefing paper, Syria, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 182.
4. Ibid.
5. Syrian permanent mission to the UN, Haytham Kaylani, to Kissinger, Memo of conversation, November 21, 1973, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 182.
6. Briefing paper, Syria's position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 180.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Syrian permanent mission to the UN, Haytham Kaylani, to Kissinger, Memo of conversation, November 21, 1973, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 182.
10. Briefing paper, Syria's position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 180.
11. President Asad's speech on cease-fire, October 29, 1973, Damascus Domestic Service, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 182.
12. Telegram, Kissinger to Israeli ambassador, File: Kissinger's visit to Middle East, RG 59, Lot #74D416, Box 183.
13. Briefing paper on Syria, February 1974, File: Visit to Syria 1974, Lot #75D146, Record Group 59, Box 198.

14. Briefing paper, Syria's position on UN Resolution 338 and a peace conference, File: Kissinger's visit to Syrian Arab Republic, Box 180.
15. Telegram, Kissinger to US embassy, Damascus, May 27, 1974, File: Middle East trip follow-up, RG 59, Briefing Books 1958–1976, Lot #75D146, Middle East trip follow-up, May 1974, Box 204.
16. Memo, Atherton to Washington, July 8, 1974, Detailing Asad's July 5 interview in 'Al-Ahram, File: Pol-15-1, Head of State, Cabinet, Syria 1974. DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
17. Telegram, USINT in Damascus to Secretary of State, March 1974, File: FT-11-2, Boycotts Syria 1974. DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Memo, Atherton to Washington, July 8, 1974, Detailing Asad's July 5 interview in 'Al-Ahram.
21. Ibid.
22. Telegram, USINT in Damascus to Secretary of State, March 1974, File: FT-11-2.
23. State Department Briefing, Alfred Atherton to Secretary of State regarding Bilateral Talks during UNGA: Syria—Foreign Minister Khaddam, September 24, 1974, File: Pol-7, Khaddam's visit to US, Syria 1974. DEF-12-5, Lot #76D451, Record Group 59, Entry A1 (5630).
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. SD Briefing paper, Syria, December 1973, File: Visit of Secretary Kissinger to Syrian Arab Republic, 1973, RG 59, Lot#74D416, Boxes 180 and 182.
27. Quotes in Syrian public statements, File: Middle East trip follow-up, RG 59, Box 204.
28. Ibid.
29. Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 146.
30. Telegram, Kissinger to Arab states, May 15, 1974, File: Middle East trip follow-up, Box 204.
31. Ibid.
32. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 159; Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 321.
33. Rabinovich, *Brink of Peace*, p. 27.
34. Kissinger to Scowcroft, October 1974, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 33.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Kissinger to Scowcroft, November 1974, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 33.
40. Ibid.

41. See Ajami, “The End of Pan Arabism”; Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 269–274.
42. Kissinger to Scowcroft, October and November 1974, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 33.
43. Ibid.
44. “Eight Israeli Points,” Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
45. Ibid.
46. Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, p. 337.
47. “Eight Israeli Points,” Records of Sisco, Box 36.
48. Ibid.
49. Hirst and Beeson, *Sadat*, p. 193.
50. Kissinger to Scowcroft—Another telegram, October 1974, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 33.
51. “Eight Israeli Points,” Records of Sisco, Box 36.
52. Memo of understanding between US and Israel, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
53. Ibid.
54. Interim Agreement by Egypt, July 3, 1975, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
55. Memo of conversation, Sadat, Kissinger, Fahmi, and Ambassador Eilts, October 9, 1974, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 33.
56. Briefing before Kissinger’s meeting with Israel’s Rabin, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
57. Speaking of the Camp David Accords in 1979, Lesch states: “Achieving full and just rights of the Palestinians became infinitely more difficult the moment Anwar Sadat signed along the dotted line—the Arab world had just lost most of its leverage”: *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 264. The agreement allowed Israel to act with greater impunity in the region. Arguably, this process was set in motion at Sinai II, as suggested by Quandt in *Peace Process*.
58. Memorandum of understanding: Agreement between the governments of Israel and the United States, Draft, August 19, 1975, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 34.
59. Israeli embassy to Washington, October 9, 1975, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
60. Memorandum of understanding: Agreement between the governments of Israel and the United States, Draft, August 19, 1975, Records of Sisco, Box 34.
61. Telegram, Egyptian embassy to Kissinger, October 9, 1975, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
62. Ibid.
63. Cairo to Washington, September 1975, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 36.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.; see also: Yoram Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace* (University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 132.
76. Cairo to Washington, September 1975, Records of Sisco, Box 36; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 646.
77. Cairo to Washington, September 1975, Records of Sisco, Box 36.
78. Not least shown in the statements made by Sadat himself in which he announced that he was taking a pragmatic, realistic, and unemotional approach—see: Yoram Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace*, pp. 132–133; see also: describing Sadat's policy as a “more realistic approach,” Raphael Israeli, *Man of Defiance* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 172.
79. Cairo to Washington, September 1975, Records of Sisco, Box 36.
80. Ibid.
81. Author's interview with Imad Moustapha, Syrian ambassador to the United States, Washington, DC, June 2009, in which he stated that Syria would not be prepared to pay a political price and sacrifice the Palestinians as Egypt did; he stated that Syria's stance against Israel made it the most popular state in Arab public opinion, ahead of Mubarak's Egypt (i.e., because Syria had not gone against public opinion as Egypt had).
82. Indeed, according to Lesch, Sadat “was the one who made most of the concessions”: 1979 *the Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East*, p. 44.
83. James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 424.
84. Letter from Ford to Rabin, Kissinger to General Allon, July 23, 1975, Records of Sisco, RG 59, Entry 5405, Box 34.
85. Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 134.
86. Kissinger, *Upheaval*, p. 197, 543, 555.
87. Ibid., 139.
88. Seale, *Asad*, 219; Kissinger, *Upheaval*, p. 502.

Part IV

US-Syrian Cooperation in the Post-Cold War Era

At the close of the 1970s after the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Syria found itself isolated in the region. But the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the emergence of the Islamic Republic in Tehran provided Syria with an unexpected and unlikely ally. Syria was the first state in the Middle East to recognize the new Islamist regime, and was the only state to support Iran during the Iranian hostage crisis. Thus, a long-term strategic alliance was forged between the two anti-imperialist states. This served to further entrench US-Syrian hostility throughout the 1980s, with the United States placing Syria on its list of state sponsors of terrorism, and applying greater sanctions on the regime. In this context, the Gulf crisis in 1990, when the United States sought Syria's help, marked a dramatic turnaround in the fortunes of US-Syrian relations.

The 1990s have at times been described as the decade of hope because of the unlikely improvements in relations between previously hostile states.* The disruption of previous consistencies places increased scrutiny on the role of ideology in Syria's foreign policy, and how it adapted to the altered international setting of the 1990s. Part IV seeks to examine Syria's adherence to ideology in the face of changing regional and global circumstances, and how this in turn affected its relations with the United States.

*David Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 317; Itamar Rabinovich, *Waging Peace—Israel and the Arabs 1948–2003* (Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 38.

The Gulf War and the Search for Comprehensive Peace

Syria's Participation in the Gulf War and Implications for Ideology

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded and occupied neighboring Kuwait. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 660, which condemned the invasion and demanded complete and unconditional withdrawal, secured by the use of force if necessary. This was followed soon by the cutting off of arms supplies and the deployment of US troops in Saudi Arabia.

The usual pro-western Arab states were expected to support America's charge against Saddam Hussein. But what made the Gulf War unique in comparison to previous conflicts in the region was Syria's participation on the side of the United States against Iraq, described even as the "most important of all the Arab states in the coalition."¹ The United States hoped that this unusual partnering gave the intervention more credibility, supporting American claims that most of the Arab world was opposed to Saddam Hussein's invasion and deflecting some of the criticism that this was a colonial venture.² By all accounts, Syria stuck to the terms of the embargo and economic sanctions on Iraq.³ And indeed when the war began, Syrian troops took part in backing Egyptian forces in Kuwait, although they would not go in to fight Iraqi forces.⁴

While it helped to reduce Syria's isolation in the region, it had for a while negative consequences for Syria's reputation of standing up to the United States and its external meddling in the region's affairs. It raised doubts at the time about Syria's commitment to Arab nationalist ideology, and academics and policy-makers alike for years afterward cited this event as marking the death knell for Arab nationalism in the region. Such perceptions and accusations of hypocrisy did trouble Asad. For years he

had prided himself on not caving in to pressure from the United States or from its neighbors to give up the ideological "struggle." Thus, in contrast to the eagerness of other Arab states,⁵ he was reported to have been reluctant about participating in combat operations, eventually claiming that he was committing troops in defense of vulnerable Arab states, "not for an assault on brother Arabs."⁶ To the US Secretary of State James Baker, who questioned why he was in a dilemma, Asad explained:

What do we say to the Syrian people? . . . There are Syrians who questions why we have sent forces to the Gulf . . . you talked about American public opinion. We have similar problems.⁷

Asad understood the risk he was taking in supporting the American venture. Syria's image in the eyes of other Arabs, public opinion, and not being seen to betray the ideological consistency that Syria had always publicly given great importance to, all were essential to Syria's self-identity and political credibility. Other states built their status and influence on resources or military power; Syria had built its status on the power of ideas.

Did Syria's decision to participate in the US-led coalition therefore represent a crisis in identity for the state and people, and a dilution in its Arab nationalist, anti-hegemonic ideology? Had Syria relented to the changing dynamics of a now unipolar world, in which bandwagoning with the United States was seen as the only viable option? These are the questions that are regularly posed in relation to Syria's participation in the Gulf War, with implications for the role of ideology in both Syria's foreign policy and its relations with the United States.

There are two main charges of hypocrisy leveled at Syria and its ideological claims as a result of the Gulf War. The first is that Syria sacrificed the principle of Arab unity in supporting the coalition against its Arab neighbor Iraq.⁸ The long-term political and personal rivalry between Saddam Hussein and Asad is well documented,⁹ all the more ironic given that the two states were both Ba'athist. It is often argued that Asad was eager to see action taken against Iraq because his grudge against Saddam Hussein superseded ideology.

The second charge is that Syria sacrificed the principle of protecting Arab autonomy and resistance to external intervention in the region's affairs by supporting Washington's lead against Saddam Hussein. As elucidated in the previous chapters, Syria had for years held on to the principle of challenging American dominance due to the protection that it gave to Israel. Syria contrasted itself with neighbors such as Egypt to demonstrate that it was principled and would not be pressured to "sell out" to the United States. Thus, it is argued that Asad was now willing to bandwagon with the

United States because of Soviet decline, exposing its ideological claims as mere rhetoric that failed without the backing of a superpower.

Why Did Syria Join the Military Action against Iraq?

Let us address both these arguments—it is true that Syria did have its own grievances against Iraq and there is no doubt that there was a personal component to their running dispute. However, this is too simplistic an account and reflects an unnuanced realist interpretation of the region's politics, for there were other important factors overriding this personal element that drove Syria's decision in 1990. Syria's main motivation was summed up by Baker:

... he left no doubt that he had no brief for his bitter enemy. He indicated that Saddam's invasion was wrong, and therefore Syria was adopting the principled position of supporting the coalition's efforts.¹⁰ ... Asad said: "We will do the right thing ... but it is not easy to do because of our public opinion."¹¹

Supporting the official line, Ghayth Armanazi, the Syrian head of the Arab League at the time of the Gulf War, explained:

Before viewing this period as one of cooperation with the US against a fellow Arab country, it is important to understand that Syria saw Saddam's attack against Kuwait as damaging the crucial notion of a united Arab front. Saddam's actions were giving the rest of the world the idea that the Arab world had deep divisions and were willing to threaten and attack each other. This was deemed by Syria as a greater threat to pan-Arab ideology, than seeking the help of an external power.¹²

While such a position lacks the greater complexity that was likely to be involved in Asad's motives, it does in many ways reflect the primarily *political* nature of Arab nationalism, and the notion that Arab sovereignty, which rested on the need for order within the regional system, was paramount. One of the greatest threats to these principles had come after the First World War when the region was in disorder, and Arabs collaborated with European powers to annex territory and create their own monarchies. During the Gulf War, however (and according to the official Syrian line), the Arab states were not cooperating with the United States to take Iraq's territory for themselves, but to protect another Arab state, Kuwait, from being overpowered. If Iraq's actions were left unchallenged, this would create disorder in the region and would be used an excuse for external powers to

enter the region again under the pretext of restoring order. A contained intervention, one that united the Arabs in a common cause, was deemed as a legitimate reason for acting against another Arab state.¹³

After the war, Asad was challenged by the Jordanians at an Arab summit, who queried how Syria could justify working with the Americans, and who called for a solely Arab solution to the crisis. Asad responded by asking how many of the Arab states present would have been willing or ready to commit forces to liberate Kuwait on their own, and how many would have taken serious steps to help.¹⁴ Thus, his position was that, in that instance, accepting American help was the only option to prevent even worse developments that would disunite and weaken the whole region, making it more susceptible to external intervention in the future.¹⁵ Asad's explanation attempted to justify Syria's decision as being wholly consistent with its ideological principles.

However, if we analyze the decision in a more critical light, then it cannot be separated from the post-Cold War context. While Syria did not want to admit to yielding to the United States, the uncertain and unprecedented situation presented by US unipolarity placed a great deal of pressure on the Syrians to bandwagon in this instance, in a way that marked a great discontinuity from past policies. Furthermore, Asad's wish to rein back Iraq was less out of solidarity for Kuwait and more out of fear of Iraqi aggrandisement against its other neighbors, including Syria. Thus, very defensive, realist concerns against the United States and Iraq were also at play here.

A second factor behind Asad's decision was concern for the credibility of his own statements in support of the UN. American intervention on this occasion was seen to be different from previous instances of US involvement in the region because it had the approval of the United Nations. There had been in total 12 UN Security Council resolutions, and not responding to them would have affected the credibility of the UN.¹⁶ The UN had authorized the use of force if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait through a final Resolution 678 on November 29, 1990. After the conflict, just prior to the Madrid talks, Asad reinforced his support for the UN by stating that the UN gave collective action "international legitimacy" and "moral authority."¹⁷ Such statements of support were not unknown of the Syrian regime, at least since 1967.¹⁸ The importance Damascus claimed to give to the role of the UN was driven by the belief that it acted as a check on US and western hegemony; moreover, Syria saw the UN as an important tool of moral and political recourse against Israel, and was aware that in turn Israel perceived the UN as a "mortal enemy."¹⁹ Syria recognized that supporting UN resolutions in other issues might also increase the strength of those resolutions pertaining to Israel. Thus, the moral and legal legitimacy

of Syria's grievance against Israel had become symbiotic with defending the UN.²⁰

Finally, to challenge the notion that Syria was strongly motivated by its long-standing rivalry with Iraq, we should compare Syria's reaction to US policy toward Iraq over the subsequent years. Having supported the United States in the Gulf crisis, Syria strongly opposed US air strikes on Iraq in 1998, with numerous public demonstrations against the United States; this followed efforts by both regimes to renew diplomatic contacts late in 1997, when Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz was received in Syria. Syria took part in the oil-for-food program, exporting medicine and food to Iraq despite American sanctions on the Iraqi regime; in the same year, Syria also reopened oil pipelines that had been closed since 1982, and three border posts. Furthermore, Syria was reported to have lobbied Saudi Arabia in this time to reintegrate Iraq back into the Arab "fold."²¹

More recently, in 2003, despite the traditional rivalry between the two states, Syria was the most vocal in its opposition to the US invasion, and in doing so it placed the Syrian regime at risk from a military attack²² and put it at odds with its long-term ally Iran. So while the personal and political animosity between Damascus and Baghdad was deep, its impact on Syria's policy, and the notion that it forced Syria to align with the United States just to spite an old rival to the detriment of its ideological principles, has been exaggerated.

Why Did Syria Collude with the United States?

While it has been argued above that Syria bandwagoned with the United States during its "unipolar" moment, despite being ideologically opposed to much of American policy in the region, this too needs a more nuanced explanation. First, in 1990, the coalition against Iraq was built on factors that were very different from those that formed the "coalition of the willing" in 2003. Notably, the United States acted more gradually and did not act unilaterally. It built up diplomatic and particularly economic pressure, collectively, via the UN, before moving on to military pressure.²³

Moreover, Washington sought to avoid the appearance of the West lecturing an Arab state, yet again, and was keen to emphasize that this time the Soviet Union (in its last days), and other Arab states, were fully on board and endorsed the plan.²⁴ Damascus perceived that the United States was trying to build a genuine consensus with other parties in the region, with the UN, and even with its usual enemies (including Cuba), rather

than seeking the bare minimum needed to facilitate an American hegemonic exercise.²⁵ Indeed, as outlined above, Washington's policy served to strengthen the UN on this occasion, and not the opposite, as had been the case in the past. Going through the UN was crucial in getting the Arab states to join, in contrast to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's suggestion for unilateral action to protect US interests.²⁶ What this demonstrates is that Syria was not averse to cooperating with the United States at all costs. Its opposition to the United States over the years had been built on US policies that were at odds with Syrian ideology and interests. Where the United States was seen to be attempting a change in its approach, there was room for change in Syria's policies as well.

Finally, and crucially, Syria saw a rare opportunity in which the United States needed its support and participation, and wanted to use that as leverage to make its own demands. It questioned why the United States had come to Kuwait's aid when it had been occupied, but failed to do the same for the Palestinians against Israel. Gradually, there was growing momentum behind the notion that this occasion of Arab unity under a common cause, and Arab cooperation with the United States, should be grasped as an opportunity to break the stalemate in the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Gulf War had ended. Despite its suspicions of the United States, Syria recognized that it was "a useful power broker" and wanted to channel that influence to help the Arab cause.²⁷ At a joint press conference, Syria's foreign minister Farouk Sharaa stated:

We hope that these relations will improve to preserve the interest of the two countries and peace and stability in the region . . . we believe that an Iraqi unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait in implementation of UN security council resolution, would certainly pave the way after that for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories . . . If we take into consideration the post cold war [situation] then it is important and imperative that this region should witness genuine peace and stability. The immediate issue now is to get the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait and then certainly if you want genuine stability in the region, then we should work for a comprehensive and just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁸

Secretary of State James Baker—despite disapproval from Dennis Ross—felt that Syria's participation had an especially important symbolic value: "With Syria represented, the credibility of our Arab coalition partners was immeasurably strengthened." But he also saw the long-term benefits that went beyond the Gulf crisis; he stated: "There was no way to move a comprehensive Mideast peace process forward without the active involvement of Syria."²⁹ President George H. W. Bush reinforced this position when he

told Baker: "I think you should consider going to Syria. I don't want to miss the boat again."

This demonstrates the difference with which this administration considered the role of Syria compared to previous and subsequent administrations.³⁰ In public, the United States did not want to make the linkage between intervention in the Gulf and the Arab-Israeli conflict, for fear that Saddam Hussein would use it to sow disunity among the Arabs.³¹ But in private, particularly when trying to secure Syria's support, the United States was very clear that it intended to build on the coalition that had been formed to work for a comprehensive peace plan after the Gulf crisis, stating:

We're optimistic that the circumstances that bring Syria, Egypt, and the Gulf states together in a major Arab coalition can augur well for the future of the Arab-Israeli peace process.³²

The key winner from Syria's participation in the coalition was the Middle East peace process, and not necessarily Syria on its own. Syria did gain from its participation—the Gulf War had left Syria "in a stronger position with regard to virtually all of its major regional concerns."³³ It was more involved in matters of regional security, was consulted more frequently by Egypt and the Gulf states, reflected by the fact the Gulf Cooperation Council next met in Damascus to discuss regional security. But these gains in international recognition were needed to counter the damage of years of international isolation; moreover, it was not just recognition for the sake of prestige, but rather it gave Syria greater leverage in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was Syria's involvement that led the United States to realize that "it could no longer seek to exclude [Syria] from any role in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict."³⁴ In turn, Syria felt its participation in the coalition was justified to provide an alternative voice to that of Israel and the pro-American Arab states in regional affairs.

In terms of economic and material advantage, this certainly did act as a motivating factor for other regional states that joined the coalition. In the run-up to the Gulf War as the United States sought to secure its coalition partners, it ended up forgiving Egypt its \$7.1 billion of debt.³⁵ Similarly, when Turkey agreed to provide its bases for the US military, it required an increase in World Bank loans, which were raised to \$1–\$1.5 billion. Thus, clearly much of the bandwagoning with the United States, even among long-term allies, was partially motivated by financial aid. It is worth noting that Syria did not benefit from any such loans or debt repayments in return for its participation in the coalition. Moreover, the United States secured

Syrian support even before promising that the Saudis would pay for Syria's "expeditionary costs."

Syria's cooperation with the United States on this occasion was limited to being a strategic move; it reflected a mix of a perceived principled necessity with the intention of furthering the Arabs' cause in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the need to avoid alienating the United States too much in the new unipolar system.³⁶ But Damascus did not appear to be attempting a wholesale change in its policy, as Egypt had under Sadat; it would thus be inaccurate to view this episode as a realignment of ideology. If it had sought a deeper alliance with the United States, it might have asked more freely for financial aid, knowing that the United States would in turn have expectations of greater political compliance from Syria in future; this was not the case.

Overall, it was the Gulf War and the coalition that was formed with the Arabs, and US consensus with the Soviet Union, that launched a renewed Middle East peace process.³⁷ Washington's handling of the crisis, the evident concern it had shown to build up a coalition of all Arab parties,³⁸ and its standing by its promises to seek a comprehensive resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict afterward helped to remove some of the intense mistrust that had developed between both Syria and the United States over the years. And unlike on previous occasions, it seemed this trust was valued by the US administration—an outcome that it did not want to jeopardize. Baker stated after Desert Storm was over that he wanted to return to the idea of the Middle East peace process, reflecting that "having given my word in this regard, I felt a moral obligation to follow through."³⁹

The Launch of the Madrid Talks—Breakthrough in the Middle East

In October 1991, the Arab parties, Israel, the United States, and the Soviet Union met at a peace conference in Madrid in order to reach a final peace agreement. Given the failures of the previous attempts, this might have seemed idealistic. But there were a number of important differences between the post-Gulf War and post-October War contexts. First, the end of the Cold War signaled a new era in which the United States was able to engage with the Middle East without constantly framing its policies in anticipation of the USSR's actions. This allowed them a greater level of flexibility in facilitating the interests of the Middle East states. Second, the United States had managed to forge much closer links with all the Arab states, including Syria, after the successful coalition across ideological lines against Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War; it was a time in which, as James Baker put it, the United States "stood at the zenith of

[its] influence in the Middle East."⁴⁰ The mood toward the United States was certainly more conciliatory compared to the antagonistic atmosphere immediately following Arab-Israeli hostilities in 1973. Third, American President George Bush appeared to be less overtly ideological or pro-Israel than Reagan,⁴¹ and was more forceful in condemning the spread of settlements.⁴² This greater evenhandedness aided greater trust from the Arab side of negotiations. This relationship of trust was strengthened by the fact that major figures in the State Department were accepted by all parties as having no particular personal connections with either the Israeli or Arab sides.⁴³

This atmosphere of optimism and sense of opportunity was followed up with concrete achievements in deciding the format and procedure of the talks. Given the dissatisfaction over even basic arrangements on previous occasions, these marked a breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict at that time:

- (1) It was the first time that all the parties were involved in peace talks collectively, and speaking to each other directly. Since 1967, Syria had been consistent in demanding Palestinian inclusion in any talks, and its demand in return for cooperation in the Gulf War had been for a comprehensive peace settlement.⁴⁴ Both premises were accepted as a fundamental condition for the first time in any negotiations.⁴⁵ Thus, the incentive for Syrian cooperation was greater, or, from a skeptical US perspective, the incentive for obstructionism was therefore minimized.
- (2) All parties eventually agreed to the format and content of the negotiations, which had remained contested during the disengagement talks. At first, there were deep conflicting goals that appeared to be irresolvable: Israel did not want to focus on territorial issues at all. Yitzhak Shamir, the Israeli prime minister and leader of the right-wing Likud party, was clear in his unwillingness to relinquish any territory. Shamir reminded the United States that President Ford had virtually promised Israel that it could remain on the Golan;⁴⁶ this stunted talks before they even started, for there was no basis for discussion without the notorious but now-accepted land-for-peace formula initiated by Kissinger. Facing an impasse, Baker put forward the proposition that if Israel did agree to withdraw from the Golan, US troops might be stationed there instead of directly handing it over to Syrian military control.⁴⁷ To this, Shamir is recorded to have retracted his refusal to withdraw.⁴⁸ Thus, the all important agreement to withdraw *seemed* to have been extracted from Israel at this stage.

In direct contrast to Israel's demands, Syria was adamant that the only basis on which it would participate was if the talks pursued the existing UN resolutions, particularly 242, stipulating the return of Arab territory.⁴⁹ Syria's demands were not restricted to Syrian land but were applied to all Arab territories occupied by Israel. Also, in opposition to Israel, Syria still argued for joint discussions and contested bilateral deals; it also preferred to have the UN as mediators rather than the United States. If Syria were only concerned in regaining the Golan, as some analysts have suggested, it would not have shown such consistent opposition to bilateral deals, which, as Egypt had demonstrated, were in fact more conducive to a state's self-interests. But instead, Syria's foreign minister and delegate to Madrid, Farouk Sharaa, stated that the implementation of UN resolutions

Should not be the subject of new bargaining during bilateral organisation. Rather they should be implemented in all provisions and on all fronts . . . This means that every inch of Arab land occupied by the Israelis by war and force, the Golan, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza strip, must be returned in their entirety to their legitimate owners.⁵⁰

To overcome this impasse, the United States first agreed to work on the basis of UN Resolution 242, which had been largely sidelined during the disengagement agreements.⁵¹ Second, it maintained that talks should be conducted on a mixed basis of both bilateral talks (to produce reciprocal compromises for all parties), and multilateral talks (for region-wide issues). While Sharaa noted his and other Arabs' opposition to any bilateral talks, which they saw as a divide-and-rule tactic,⁵² their acceptance of the compromised format for the pre-negotiation phase marked the first concession by the Syrians to facilitate the progress of the talks. They still hoped for a common Arab approach and Arab coordination during the negotiations, but the promise of multilateral talks on region-wide issues partially placated the Syrians for now. Thus, both Syria and Israel made important concessions before talks could even begin.

- (3) There was further promise at the start of the Madrid talks due to an important change in the approach of the US administration itself, particularly toward Syria. Though not relating to the actual content or format, this had a significant bearing on the direction of talks under the Bush administration. In all previous talks, Syria's role was merely seen as being instrumental in persuading other Arab parties to participate—a resolution that would also satisfy Syria's demands was not one of Washington's goals, and indeed when the main priority of Israeli-Egyptian peace had been secured at Camp

David, the Syrian-Israeli front became neglected. In contrast, Baker stated with regard to the Madrid talks that

With Syria represented, the credibility of our Arab coalition partners was immeasurably strengthened. But I had a more long-term purpose in mind. There was no way to move a comprehensive Mideast peace process forward without the active involvement of Syria . . . ⁵³

Both Baker and Bush saw Syria as having more than just a symbolic part to play in the peace talks; rather, they felt that peace on the Syrian-Israeli front could unlock the impasse on other fronts and thereby lead to the comprehensive peace that was so needed in the region. Thus, Syria was viewed with greater importance than it was under Nixon and Kissinger and their successors.

Stalemate

Despite such positive foundations, a stalemate ensued in the early phase of negotiations. There could be no progress if all sides were not willing to make compromises—Syria, for its part, signaled willingness to do so if its conditions were met. By March 1992, they had signaled a commitment to end the conflict with Israel and to sign a peace treaty with Israel based on a comprehensive peace plan between Arabs and Israelis, although in reality Syria's vision of any treaty was closer to a nonbelligerency pact than the full normalization that Israel was seeking.⁵⁴ These were significant offers, but notably based on clear conditions, these being Israeli withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied from June 4, 1967, and the fulfillment of Palestinian rights.⁵⁵ For a while, Asad still maintained his demand that the Madrid conference be held under UN auspices. But ultimately, after much shuttle diplomacy, Asad was willing to have just a UN spokesperson at the conference and accepted the invitation. According to Baker, this was the single most important factor to ensure the conference went ahead.⁵⁶

On the Israeli side, however, American diplomacy seemed to have less effect. Helena Cobban states:

To be sure, as long as Shamir's government remained in power, it is fair to say that no substantive progress was made on this track—or, indeed, on any of the other tracks—of the Madrid-launched peace process.⁵⁷

Having agreed to enter talks after Baker's offer of US troops on the Golan, Israel showed unwillingness to give any commitment to withdrawal, and mooted instead the idea of reciprocal territorial exchanges between Israel and Syria⁵⁸—something that was unthinkable for the Syrians. Though

labeled as intransigent by Israel, Syria argued that its terms for full withdrawal merely echoed UNSCR 242, and was therefore entirely justified. Moreover, on the Palestinian front, despite releasing 1,200 prisoners captured during the Intifada in April 1991, Israel continued to build settlements in the occupied territories (with an announcement that 13,000 new units of housing would be built over three years).⁵⁹ Baker stated that he saw these moves as “a deliberate effort to sabotage peace.”⁶⁰

This stalemate ate up valuable time and much of the optimism that the talks had started out with. By October 1991, the 120-day period that Bush and Baker had set to push for as much progress as possible was coming to an end. During this time, Israel’s relations with the United States were also tense.⁶¹ Baker announced that the US administration would grant the entire \$10 billion loan that Israel requested, on condition that Israel froze all settlement activity in the occupied territory—any money Israel spent on finishing construction that had already been started would result in a deduction from the loan—thus ensuring that no loan money would go toward settlement construction.⁶² Pro-Israeli senators proposed more favorable terms, but Bush threatened to veto such proposals for fear that it would destroy the fragile peace talks. In the end, the foreign aid bill was passed in the United States without the usual loan guarantees for Israel.⁶³ According to Baker, this had a significant impact on the Israeli elections—while one might expect it to have led to increased nationalism in Israel, thus keeping the Likud government in power, the reverse happened, with Labor winning Israel’s elections in June 1992, and Yitzhak Rabin coming to power.⁶⁴

While it is difficult to ascertain, it is very likely that this episode had some impact on the American presidential elections as well. This assertive move by the Bush administration made it particularly unpopular among the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States. While it is inaccurate and simplistic to attribute too much influence to the American-Israeli lobby, it should not be dismissed either. Then, as now, it held important ties in the economy and politics, and was one of the oldest and best-established lobby groups in the United States. Thus, Bush’s challenge to Shamir also strengthened Jewish-American support for the Democrat opposition.⁶⁵

Bush was ultimately defeated in the US elections, bringing in a new Democrat administration and Bill Clinton as president. It was this administration that would be in charge of mediating the talks until 1996, when they eventually broke down.

Transition from Bush to Clinton

The changes in the Israeli Knesset and US administration had an important impact on the peace process. On the Israeli side, Rabin showed himself

to be more open to negotiations than Shamir; this opened up a second phase of negotiations that provided more opportunities for progress. Rabin began negotiations with the Syrians in August 1992 with a mutually acceptable foundation for both sides—the acceptance of the territorial condition in Resolution 242, stipulating the withdrawal from all occupied territories, reciprocated by security guarantees.⁶⁶

During this round of talks, the Syrians submitted via their chief negotiator, Walid Muallem,⁶⁷ a document laying out an agenda and declaration of principles for the talks. These came under four sections: withdrawal, security arrangements, normal peaceful relations, and “timetable for fulfilment.”⁶⁸ The analogy of “four legs of a table” was used frequently to refer to this plan, particularly by Rabin, and was recognized by all sides, including Israel, as a significant step by the Syrians, who had never put forward such a clear intent for a resolution up until now—indeed, it formed the basis of all future discussions.⁶⁹

Despite this positive signal, a second break to proceedings ensued, initially due to the changeover between the Bush and Clinton administrations. This effectively meant the American mediators were seen as members of a “lame-duck” government, and meant the negotiations were “rudderless” during the transition period.⁷⁰ This was coupled with a flare-up between Israeli soldiers and Hamas on the Gaza border. When three Israeli soldiers were killed, Rabin responded by ordering the deportation of 400 suspected Palestinian activists into North Lebanon. This heightened Arab anger and evoked fears of previous expulsions of Palestinians by the Israeli Defense Force, prompting all the Arab parties including Syria to suspend participation in the talks.

Thus, when the Clinton administration came into office in January 1993, there were no negotiations in process. To an extent, this hiatus suited the Clinton administration—first, it allowed them to focus on the crisis in Bosnia, which was of more pressing concern to them at the time. Second, according to Samuel Lewis, the new head of Policy Planning at the State Department, the Democrat administration had “close links to many parts of the American Jewish community” and so “was not about to do anything to cause an open crisis with Israel.”⁷¹ They had learnt the lessons of their predecessors, and were not wishing to make themselves unpopular so early on in government.

From Oslo to COS I

Dramatic and unexpected events in September 1993 brought the world's attention back to the peace process. Rabin and chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat, signed the first ever agreement

between Israel and a Palestinian representative. This was unexpected not least because it came after a deadlock in the talks and was particularly surprising given Israel's recent actions against the Palestinian activists. Moreover, the United States had been slow in following up the peace process, which in the summer appeared to be in jeopardy. It was clear therefore that this sudden deal was a result of *secret* negotiations solely between the Israelis and Palestinians, which the Syrians had been kept in the dark about.

After initial procrastination, Clinton now pushed for a resumption of talks on the Syrian-Israeli front. However, it was not just Syria that had reservations about the impact of the Oslo accords. Rabin feared that any deal with Syria so soon afterward would turn Israeli public opinion against him. He persuaded Clinton to postpone any talks with Syria until the end of the year. Such was the perceived breakthrough of the Oslo accords that it convinced Clinton that he "was on the right track in letting Rabin take the lead on peace process issues,"⁷² and thus he delegated Rabin with even more leadership as a result. Despite their frustration at yet another delay, the Syrians nevertheless agreed to wait and even mustered some positive enthusiasm in time for the US-organized Geneva summit in January 1994 in anticipation of concrete developments, stating "we are ready to sign peace now."⁷³ Evidently, the Palestinian-Israeli deal had motivated Syria in its search for a settlement as well.

However, such readiness by the Syrians was dampened by Israel's declaration that any agreement over the Golan Heights would be put to the Israeli people in a referendum.⁷⁴ This was coupled by a new obstacle concerning the very foundations of the peace talks. Rabin was now having doubts about the term "full withdrawal" from the Golan. Having earlier given an apparent commitment to the United States and the Syrians when he took over as prime minister,⁷⁵ he now clarified his position to US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that he was only offering full withdrawal (to the June 4, 1967, lines) as a *hypothetical* situation merely to gauge Syria's response, rather than as a conditional commitment.⁷⁶ It was a crucial difference, but presented with sufficient ambiguity as to not yet obstruct the talks; for example, Syria interpreted Rabin's clarification as confirmation of his initial commitment. This is demonstrated by Sharaa's comments that the *apparently* shared understanding of the final objectives of talks "made a lot of changes and enhanced the confidence of both sides."⁷⁷

Once again, as had occurred in the summer of 1993, developments on another track diverted Israel's and America's attention away from the Syrian negotiations for the third time at a critical stage. This time, it was a breakthrough on the Jordanian front—on July 25, both Israel and Jordan had agreed to the principles for a formal peace treaty, pledging to achieve this within two months.⁷⁸ This again exacerbated the pressure on Syria and

undermined the comprehensive premise of the talks that Syria had fought so long for.

Talks resumed for a third time after this pause. With the agenda *seemingly* agreed upon, Clinton urged both parties to move on to the second leg of negotiations concerning security. He proposed that these discussions be conducted with Syria's and Israel's military chiefs of staff rather than the political leaders. The chiefs of staff talks, or COS (I), as the first round of security discussions became known, were led by Hikmat Shihabi on the Syrian side and Ehud Barak on the Israeli side on December 21, 1994. Ultimately, they did not produce any fruits, with both sides conceding them to have been a failure.⁷⁹

When talks restarted for a fourth time in May 1995, security arrangements were to be discussed once again, but this time with the input of the political leadership first, to avoid the farce of COS I. These talks were far more substantive than those that had preceded it, with US Secretary of State Warren Christopher shuttling between Israel and Syria, and Sharaa visiting Washington to make significant contributions to the drafting of terms known as the "Aims and Principles" document.

From COS II to Breakdown of Talks

Despite the ambiguity built into the "Aims and Principles" document (more of which will be discussed later on), all parties were prepared to move on to the implementation phase of the terms through a second round of COS talks. The main problem the Israelis were facing at this stage was breaking the news of their intention to withdraw from the Golan to their public; having implied this commitment to Syria and the mediators, the leaders were now reluctant to announce this openly.⁸⁰ Each time Rabin was queried about the agreed demarcation line, he used the ambiguity created in negotiations to shield the extent of his agreements with Syria and the United States from the public.⁸¹ In contrast, Shimon Peres was far more vocal about the commitments Israel was expected to make in these negotiations. Hoping it might placate public opinion, he compared giving up the Golan to the precedent set by a Likud government that gave up the Sinai; and noted that like Gaza, the Golan did not constitute sacred land for the Israelis.⁸²

I am convinced we must not hesitate and must not allow the chances of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East slip between our fingers . . . There are no tricks here, we have two truths and we must choose one: remaining on the Golan Heights means giving up peace.⁸³

These hints from the government were seized upon by the Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu, who used these statements to whip up more frenzy and opposition against the peace process among the Israeli public.⁸⁴ The mention of possible evacuation of settlements galvanized the Israeli settlers, the most hostile to the peace process, into greater opposition toward it.⁸⁵ Anti-withdrawal activists began campaigning at the Knesset to protect the “Golan law” of 1981 through which Israel had formally (but illegally) annexed the Golan—a majority vote would have to be passed to allow any amendments to the law. Furthermore, hundreds of demonstrators protested against Rabin and clashed with the police.⁸⁶ Amid an already volatile situation, the extent of withdrawal demanded and expected by the negotiating parties was leaked to the press, most likely by a participant present at the meetings.

Against this backdrop, the COS II talks continued dealing with sensitive discussions about the “Aims and Principles” document and its implementation. And yet further issues arose that complicated matters and soured the atmosphere during negotiations. The Israeli delegate General Tzvi Shtaubert’s papers were leaked to the Israeli press. His document emphasized the military advantages of the positions currently occupied by Israel on the Golan, and highlighted Syria’s demands for them to be demilitarized altogether after withdrawal—this stirred up greater fervor among Israelis about the need to retain the Golan.⁸⁷ On June 28, another blow to negotiations occurred. Yet another leak, this time from Netanyahu, disclosed to the Knesset a so-called “document of concessions” discussed in the talks, which was then duly published in an Israeli newspaper the next day.⁸⁸ This information aggravated public opposition to any level of withdrawal.

Using this hostility as an opportunity to push for a change in the initial terms of agreement, Israel proposed that in addition to having US troops located on the Golan instead of Syrian troops, Israel should also maintain its own troops on the strategically vital Mount Hermon. Furthermore, Israel insisted on stationing an early warning system on the Golan.⁸⁹

Syria was dismayed at these developments on two accounts: (1) it was angered about the leaks of the meetings to the Knesset and to the Israeli press, sensing that this demonstrated a lack of seriousness on the part of the Israelis.⁹⁰ In the end, according to Muallem, COS II never got round to discussing the third item on the agenda (the international forces) directly as a result of these leaks.⁹¹ (2) The Syrians completely disputed Israel’s demand to retain Mount Hermon and to station troops or an early warning system on the Golan as a disregard for Syria’s sovereignty.⁹² Israel’s latest demand was seen as being highly provocative.

Thereafter, both sides appeared to clamp down on previously agreed concessions. Due to the new demands being introduced in COS II, and the number of leaks, Asad no longer wished to engage in the military talks but wanted to return to the diplomatic channels. This in turn was seen as "bad faith" by Rabin, who called it "inflexibility."⁹³ Thus, the fourth attempt at negotiations had ended without success.

The extent of public hostility to the peace process in Israel provides the crucial backdrop to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995, by a Jewish fundamentalist. The shock of Rabin's assassination brought the two sides back to the starting points of negotiations. Shimon Peres, both Rabin's long-term rival within the Labor Party but also his partner in the peace process, took over as prime minister and immediately brought a very different approach to the negotiations. Whereas Rabin was slow and cautious, dealing with each track separately at a time, Peres wanted to move quickly and to negotiate each track simultaneously (although still bilaterally). By January 1996, the United States considered the peace process to be back on track and, despite the setbacks and numerous delays, reinitiated talks to finalize the agreements that had been made thus far.⁹⁴ According to Muallem, the expectation was that a final document from all sides would be ready by September 1996.⁹⁵

Three significant events occurred to halt proceedings. The first, and arguably the most important, was Peres' decision on January 25, during the talks at the Wye Plantation, to call early elections in Israel.⁹⁶ The impact that elections and changes in government can have on such negotiations was already exemplified with the changeover from the Bush to the Clinton administration in the United States. This change altered the direction and eventual outcome of the talks. Rabin's assassination undoubtedly already had an impact on negotiations, not only because his leadership had been such a marked change from the open intransigence of Yitzhak Shamir, but also because his negotiating style was distinctly cautious and slow moving. However, while the style had now changed under Peres, the substance of Israel's negotiating terms had not—this was, after all, the same Labor government. The call of elections, however, and the prospect of a Likud government coming to power generated a sense of futility in any further proceedings.

Despite this, the United States intimated that they still wanted the talks to continue, and thus they were resumed in Maryland in February 1996. But shortly afterward, the second set of events to affect negotiations took place. Four suicide bomb attacks (attributed to Hamas) were carried out between February 25 and March 4, 1996, two in Jerusalem, one in Ashkelon and another in Tel Aviv; Israel immediately informed the United States and Syria that it had suspended the talks. Muallem stated,

From that time of course, everything began to collapse. The international and Israeli focus shifted to combating terrorism.⁹⁷

Two conferences were organized, one in Sharm el-Sheikh and another in Washington, to discuss “antiterrorism,” but from then until the Israeli elections, there was no further discussion of the peace process.

The third and final event to halt the talks occurred when on May 31, 1996, Peres and the Labor government lost the elections, and Binyamin Netanyahu, the hard-line Likud leader and perennial opponent of the peace talks, was voted into power. With that ended all further negotiations between Syria and Israel until 1998–2000 under a new Israeli government and prime minister.

Implications for US-Syrian Relations

During Bush’s tenure as US president, with James Baker as his secretary of state, it is arguable that US-Syrian relations were at their most cooperative. On the American side, there was a higher degree of empathy for Syria’s position, in terms of both its regional role and Syria’s concern about public opinion. Moreover, the administration recognized Syria’s importance to the viability of peace in the Middle East more than any preceding US government; as a result, it was anxious to involve the Syrians rather than marginalize them, and gave more consideration to Syrian demands as issues that needed to be resolved if there was any chance of achieving peace.

On the Syrian side, both American rhetoric and actions instilled in them a greater level of trust. The greater attempt on the part of the United States to be and also appear more evenhanded in its approach to both Arabs and Israelis had an impact. Notably, the withholding of the US loan to Israel due to continued settlement building, despite the negative political fallout in the United States, demonstrated to the Syrians the seriousness of US intentions for a comprehensive peace in the region. In a rare vote of confidence, Asad stated to Baker:

We have come to the conclusion that you are strong and decisive, you say what you mean, and this makes us believe that you are a straightforward man. It’s important that a person be frank and direct, whether or not we agree. When these qualities are there, even if there is no agreement, there is trust.⁹⁸

And although the “special relationship” was never in danger, it was notable that improved US-Syrian cooperation coincided with a nadir in US relations with Israel under Shamir. It was one of the rare occasions during

negotiations since 1973 when the United States acknowledged that Israel was displaying the greatest intransigence of all the parties, rather than laying the blame with Syria, and was prepared to make this public if Israel continued to obfuscate.⁹⁹ The lack of overt bias despite America's historical and unavoidable connections with Israel demonstrated that relative impartiality could be achieved by a US government—Israel's opposition to US demands for an end to settlement construction did not demonstrate that the Bush-Baker camp was favoring the Arabs, as some in Israel interpreted (the settlements were, after all, in contravention of the Geneva Convention, and thus Washington was merely upholding international law), but rather the extent of American leniency toward Israel in the past. This shift in Washington's approach as mediators also could be seen as a significant change from Kissinger's diplomacy. Moreover, greater evenhandedness had a significant impact on Syria's responsiveness to US efforts and willingness to seriously invest in the peace process.¹⁰⁰

Under the Clinton administration, however, relations between Syria and the United States took a downturn. Damascus maintained in the aftermath of the failed negotiations that they were satisfied with the US role as mediators. Muallem described them as "moderators, brokers, even partners . . ." in the talks.¹⁰¹ He highlighted the instrumental role of the United States in bringing both sides back to the table after the COS I talks had failed, by drafting and pushing forward the "Aims and Principles" document outlining security arrangements.¹⁰² Without this, talks would not have resumed by June 1995. Thus, there clearly were times when the United States as mediators sought to push the peace process forward, and without their input it would not have progressed.¹⁰³ However, several aspects to Washington's approach to mediating, which then affected Syrian perceptions of the US role, can be identified.

First, there was an important change between the Bush and Clinton administrations. With the Bush administration, the relationship with Israel was based on the traditional ties between both *states* over the decades and was largely a political connection. Under the Clinton administration, the relationship with Israel was deeper. There were greater personal connections among the staff, many of whom on the American side were of a Jewish background.¹⁰⁴ This was particularly the case in the State Department, which had the greatest involvement in the peace process and greatest interaction with the Arab parties. The administration also depended a lot more on political support from the Jewish-American community.¹⁰⁵ And finally, there was simply greater affinity and personal bonds between the leaders. Clinton developed a close personal friendship with Rabin—indeed, over the years, Clinton came to see Rabin as a mentor, even a "father figure," and communicated with him over even the smallest details of the peace

process.¹⁰⁶ Apart from regular meetings—Rabin would meet with Clinton face to face twice yearly—the two leaders were in telephone contact regularly. This was nothing like his relations with the Arab counterparts, whom he rarely met and usually conveyed information to via his intermediaries, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Dennis Ross from the State Department.¹⁰⁷

However, the United States' close alliance with another state, and the identity affiliations of its staff cannot be cited as reason enough for the continued grudge between the United States and Syria. It was the perceived impact on US conduct as mediators that caused friction. The pace of the talks seemed to be determined by Israel's wishes, with little intervention by the United States when talks were postponed or stalled. Israel was not adequately challenged by the United States when introducing new elements to the negotiations that were not a part of the originally agreed terms, such as early warning systems on Mount Hermon and the suggestion to put full withdrawal to a popular referendum. And when Israel engaged in acts of belligerence in the region, they were not condemned by the United States nor was pressure placed on Israel to desist. Indeed, the Syrians were acutely aware that much of Israel's firepower was sponsored by the United States. In answer to the following question posed to him, "have the Americans been true to their role as honest broker?," Muallem replied:

This is difficult to answer. Of course you cannot compare the Americans' relations with Syria with their relations with Israel, but at least we are satisfied with their role.¹⁰⁸

The last words are those of a diplomat, bearing in mind that Walid Muallem had been the Syrian ambassador to the United States; it is the first statement that, in its ambivalence, is more indicative of the Syrian view of the United States as mediators.

Second, there is no evidence that the new administration did recognize the value of Syria's role in the peace process in the same way that Baker expressed in his memoirs. Unsurprisingly, given the regular extent of Israeli-American communication, Washington was "mindful" and highly sympathetic to the constraints faced by Rabin at home in moving forward on the peace process, feeling that he had done much to change his views, whereas in contrast it was felt Syria "was not doing as much reframing" of their views toward Israel¹⁰⁹—this despite the fact that the ideas for a constructive plan to work with and calls for greater urgency had come from the Syrian side, as opposed to the frequent stalling from Israel. Furthermore, Asad's response to Rabin's wavering, and his insistence on Israeli withdrawal before any discussions on normalization as was agreed from the

outset were described as “an unimaginative and unyielding response” by Christopher.¹¹⁰ He went on to note that Asad had made a “new, highly controversial demand” for a return to the pre-1967 Syrian-Israeli border—a demand that in fact Syria had always maintained during all negotiations.¹¹¹ Exemplifying the contrasting perceptions that the United States held of Israel and Syria, Christopher expressed his view that

Rabin had shown himself to be a visionary by allowing me to present Assad with the possibility of a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. Assad, however, appeared paralyzed in the face of this historic opportunity.¹¹²

This assessment fails to acknowledge the additional requests by Israel to station troops on the Golan even after withdrawal, and the fact that Israel’s “breakthrough” offer of withdrawal was nothing new. It had in fact been the only reason why Syria had agreed to participate in talks in the first place.

Thus, with the Clinton administration, there was a return to perceptions of Syrian intransigence and obstructionism that were held by Kissinger and held sway with the US administrations of old. The Bush administration had been interested in recognizing Syria’s efforts by agreeing to reassess the sanctions that had been placed on Syria since 1967 and 1979, and to potentially reconsider Syria’s position on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism.¹¹³ In contrast, no such moves were contemplated by the Clinton administration. The lack of reciprocal movement by the United States toward Syria under Clinton was noted by Muallem:

There was . . . pressure in that our relations with the United States never progressed during the four or five years of this process; to the contrary, we were kept on the American “blacklist,” and Congress tried to adopt additional measures this Summer [of 1997].¹¹⁴

The overall impact of the negotiation process on US-Syrian relations then was negative. From a positive start under the Bush administration, Syria’s confidence in the United States as neutral mediators deteriorated under Clinton.¹¹⁵ This continued throughout the stagnant years of the Likud government. While there was a window of opportunity remaining for peace during Ehud Barak’s Labor government in 1998, continued Israeli leaks and the perception that the United States was not taking the Syrian-Israeli track seriously enough exacerbated Syria’s lack of trust in the United States. Syria’s disdain for the US approach rose to a peak during the Shepherdstown talks in 2000, which ended dismally without resolution despite a last-gasp attempt by Washington to respond to what had been significant overtures for peace from Syria.¹¹⁶

Notes

1. Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 320.
2. Djerejian, Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Helsinki summit, Moscow ministerial, Europe: RG 59, Press materials for the secretary's trips 1989–1993, UDW8, Box 7.
3. James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 301.
4. *Ibid.*, 374.
5. Notably Saudi Arabia and Egypt.
6. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 376.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Humphreys, *The Strange Career of Pan-Arabism*, p. 64.
9. See: Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'ath v. Ba'ath*.
10. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 297–299.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
12. Author's interview with Ghayth Armanazi, London, June 5, 2007; also corroborated by Ambassador Imad Moustapha (interview with author, Washington, DC, June 2009), who argued that "Saddam's aggression was in a way justifying the legitimacy of other forms of occupation—and also it gave a pretext to the US to come to the region. When we agreed with the US we got guarantees that the US would not occupy Iraq . . . it gave us leverage to stop the US end[ing] one evil to create another evil by occupying Iraq."
13. Djerejian, Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7.
14. Author's interview with Ghayth Armanazi, London, June 5, 2007.
15. Djerejian, Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7.
16. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 321.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 447.
18. Author's interview with the Syrian ambassador to the UN, Dr. Bashar Ja'afari, UN Headquarters New York, February 2009.
19. Baker, p. 448.
20. Author's interview with Dr. Bashar Ja'afari, UN Headquarters New York, February 2009.
21. Lucy Dean (Ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa 2004* (50th Edition, Europa Publications, 2003), p. 484.
22. Author's interview with Flynt Leverett, Former advisor to the American NSC, Washington DC, June 2009.
23. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 277.
24. Background briefing by administration official, Ankara, August 9, 1990, File: Trip of Secretary Baker to Ankara, RG 59, press materials for the Secretary's trips 1989–1993, UDW8, Box 7.
25. James Baker, August 9, 1990, Press conference, File: Trip of Secretary Baker to Ankara, Box 7.
26. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 279.
27. Author's interview with Ghayth Armanazi.
28. Press conference, Baker and FM Farouk Sharaa, Damascus international airport, September 14, 1990: Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7.

29. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 296.
30. Ibid.
31. Press conference, Baker and FM Farouk Sharaa, Damascus international airport, September 14, 1990: Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7.
32. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 298.
33. John Lunn, "Iraq," in Lucy Dean (Ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa* (Europa Publications, 2003), p. 1028.
34. Ibid.
35. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 285, 291.
36. This provides a good example of the pragmatism in Syrian ideology, and seemingly was a decision that paid off for both Syria's strategic and ideological interests, as will be demonstrated with the start of the Madrid process; this is further supported when compared with the case of Jordan, which had supported Iraq and had to make great concessions after the Gulf War in order to avoid being isolated by the United States.
37. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 277.
38. Background briefing by administration official, Ankara, August 9, 1990, File: Trip of Secretary Baker to Ankara, Box 7: in which Asad was said to have recognized the effort the United States had undertaken to achieve consensus.
39. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 414.
40. Ibid., 414–415 *passim*.
41. Ibid., 116.
42. Ibid., 122–123.
43. In fact, the White House Chief of Staff was the Lebanese John Sununu.
44. Helena Cobban, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks, 1991–96 and Beyond* (United States Institute of Peace, 1999), xi.
45. The Palestinians were present, although not under the name of the PLO but under a joint delegation with the Jordanians.
46. See: Chapter 5, plus Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 424.
47. Ibid.
48. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, 26; Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 424.
49. A demand reiterated throughout the talks, and two years later in 1995. See: Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime* (Scribner, 2001), p. 219.
50. Cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 17.
51. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 118. Baker and Bush went to great lengths to outline to Shamir and the Likud party in power the importance of Palestinian rights; this was outlined even in the annual American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) speech, despite unpopularity with the audience and being denounced by Shamir as "useless" and decried by the American-Jewish community. See: Ibid., 122. These efforts will have demonstrated important impartiality to the Arabs.
52. Djerejian, Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7.
53. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 295–296.
54. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 333.
55. Djerejian, Baker's trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7; Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 219; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall—Israel and the Arab World* (W.W. Norton

and Company, 2001), pp. 531–533. Syria’s stipulation of the June 4 boundary line was clear from the start; hence, Israel and America’s surprise at Asad’s insistence of this boundary in 1994, perceiving it as a new condition from Syria, seems unjustified.

56. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 489.
57. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 40.
58. Put forward by Yossi Ben-Aharon, Israel’s head negotiator on the Syrian track. See: Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 41. Meanwhile, in an interview with Patrick Seale in 1999, Shamir stated that Israel wanted to find a compromise but had not been interested in “a territorial compromise” with Asad, whom he described as “the enemy of Israel.” See: “Shamir: The Golan is more important,” cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 40.
59. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 444–446.
60. *Ibid.*, 446.
61. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 42.
62. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 544.
63. This was according to Baker only the second time AIPAC had been defeated on a “legislative initiative” in Congress—Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 128.
64. *Ibid.*, 541.
65. As was anticipated by Baker (*Politics of Diplomacy*, 551), who stated that “in a full-fledged fight with AIPAC, the risks to the administration would be substantial.” Also see: Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, *The Israeli Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (Penguin, 2008) for a detailed analysis of AIPAC’s influence, particularly in Congress.
66. Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, p. 532.
67. Muallem succeeded Syria’s first delegate, Muwaffaq Al-Allaf.
68. Walid Al-Moualem, “Fresh Light in the Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXXVI (2) (Winter 1997), p. 84; Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, p. 534. Shlaim argues that Israel did accept Resolution 242 as the basis for negotiations. Rabinovich however argues that Israel made the “opening gambit” by halting settlement construction on the West Bank, to which Syria responded with draft principles that were “totally unacceptable” to the Israelis (see: Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 45), but which Israel was willing to overlook to enable progress. If so, this would explain why there were significant and foundational discrepancies at the later stage of talks—nevertheless, Rabin himself appeared to use the draft principles as a reference point during negotiations.
69. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 46.
70. *Ibid.*; Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 48.
71. Cobban interview with Samuel Lewis, former US ambassador to Israel: Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 47.
72. Samuel Lewis, interview with Cobban, cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 61.
73. *Ibid.*, quoting Asad in news conference, shown on a Syrian Arabic news channel.
74. In doing so “Rabin made the worst mistake” as it undermined negotiations, according to Dr. Martha Kessler, Author’s interview, Washington, DC, May 2009.

75. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 327, 333: according to Lesch, Israel is reported to have given this commitment to the American intermediaries without putting it in writing or announcing it themselves, so that, as some have argued, they could deny it if negotiations collapsed. Rabinovich, however, argues that Syria chose to ignore the distinction between what he calls Israel's "hypothetical deposition" and a formal "commitment" (*Waging Peace*, p. 56–57). Whether Israel did or did not make a formal commitment to withdraw to the pre-war lines remained an issue of contention even when talks were started again under Ehud Barak in 1998. But it remains the case that Syria would not have even agreed to enter into negotiations if this agreement had not been secured.
76. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 221.
77. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 63, interview with Farouk Sharaa.
78. The treaty was signed on July 25, 1994. In order to confirm the deal, the United States wiped out Jordan's debt to it to the sum of \$700 million, and arranged \$200 million funding and support for modernizing Jordan's army (see: Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 214). Such arrangements were typical of the incentives used to secure the cooperation of parties in the peace process. The financial "carrot" for signing peace with Israel was therefore substantial.
79. Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, p. 535.
80. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 77.
81. A similar strategy was adopted in relation to the final status aims for the Oslo agreement; see: Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 329–330.
82. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, pp. 78–79.
83. "Peres Views Price of Peace with Syria," *Haaretz* (Tel Aviv), May 26, 1995, cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*.
84. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 80.
85. Madeleine Albright, *Madame Secretary* (Macmillan, 2003), p. 475.
86. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, pp. 81–82.
87. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 331; Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 89.
88. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, pp. 90–91.
89. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 86.
90. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 96.
91. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 87.
92. Ibid. From Israel's perspective, this seemed like a reasonable demand given that the size of Syria was much greater than Israel territorially (see: Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 65). For the Syrians, this was unreasonable given Israel's far greater military capabilities that outweighed Syria's greater territorial size (see: Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 86).
93. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 99.
94. Muallem reported Dennis Ross as stating that "more had been achieved in two sessions of talks . . . than had been achieved in the entire previous four years" (Muallem, *Fresh Light*, pp. 81–94).
95. Ibid., 81.
96. Initially, Peres intended to call elections for October 1996, hoping to have secured a peace deal with the Syrians by then; after trying to rush negotiations

- at too fast a pace, it became apparent that a full deal would take much longer. He feared a situation where he would be going into the polls with only half a deal (i.e., withdrawal from the Golan, but no security arrangements), thus turning the public against him. Hence, he brought elections forward to May. See: Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, pp. 72–74.
97. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 81.
 98. Asad to Baker (Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 297).
 99. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 505–507.
 100. See: Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 45—Rabinovich acknowledges that for once Asad showed real willingness to reach a genuine agreement in response to American efforts.
 101. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 83.
 102. Ibid.
 103. For example, Rabinovich argues that after the Oslo agreement, the United States felt “beholden” to Syria and wanted Israel to return to the Syria track, not to Jordan’s. In general, he argues that the United States preferred Israel to go with the Syrian track (see: *Waging Peace*, p. 59, p. 72). Others, such as Shlaim, argue that it was Israel that adopted the “Syria first” policy because it seemed more straightforward.
 104. Author’s interview with Martha Kessler, Washington, DC, May 2009.
 105. Ibid. Kessler stated: “There are lots of organizations that are extremely wealthy and totally willing to exert their influence; [they] have an unsophisticated ‘Israel, right or wrong’ policy, and I am not sure the Clinton administration were sophisticated enough and equipped to deal with that, and could not override the Israeli lobby.”
 106. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 56—citing David Remnick, quoting Eitan Haber; also see: Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 49, who describes it as a “warm personal relationship.”
 107. Ibid.
 108. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 91.
 109. See: Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 57—interview with senior US official.
 110. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 222.
 111. Ibid., 223.
 112. Ibid., 224.
 113. Incoming telegram, Unclassified, Ambassador Djerejian background briefing remarks to journalists in Damascus, September 14, 1990, Prior to Baker’s visit; Djerejian, Baker’s trip to Persian Gulf, Box 7.
 114. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 88.
 115. Flynt Leverett even described the Clinton period as “a disaster,” adding: “it didn’t produce anything and did real damage in its failure” (Author’s interview, Washington, DC, June 2009).
 116. For full accounts of the Syrian-Israeli talks between 1998 and 2000, see: Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace, The Inside Story of the Fight for the Middle East* (FSG, 2004), 509–590; Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, pp. 502–597.

The Failure of the Madrid Process

The failure of the talks had a significant impact on US-Syrian relations. The rare opportunity for reconciliation after the Gulf crisis was not capitalized on; instead, further seeds of mistrust were sown for the rest of the decade.

One of the outcomes of the talks was a perception on the American side that Syria had not done enough to cooperate during negotiations, and had demonstrated inflexibility, while on the Syrian side the old view that the United States had not done enough to assist the Arabs in resolving their grievances, and had been too gentle with Israel, was reaffirmed. Both sides felt that these factors to some extent contributed to the lack of progress.

A number of questions arise at this juncture—Which policies of the United States and Syria were most significant in obstructing the peace process? What role did Israel and other external factors play in the breakdown of talks? To what extent was ideology an influential factor in Syria's negotiations, and if Syria was motivated, or restrained, by ideological principles, how far did such a position adversely affect the talks? History has shown that mending relations with Israel has immediately improved a state's relations with the United States, and by default afforded it greater acceptance into the "international community." Egypt, and latterly Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization, had learnt this lesson. This no small incentive for an isolated and economically struggling state was at last a tangible reality for Syria after the Gulf crisis—Was it something Syria was willing to jeopardize for the sake of ideology?

Many analysts have argued that finally, after years of inflexibility, Syria followed a realist model and was ready to forego its ideological principles in order to regain its territory, establish peace on its border, and gain international prestige through greater ties with the United States. Syria, it is

argued, was more willing than ever to sign peace with Israel and thus was at its most cooperative.

However, this of course deflects responsibility for failed talks away from Syria, and points the torchlight on the United States and Israel. Hence, some American and Israeli officials have argued that Syria was indeed still motivated by ideology, and thus was intransigent and unrealistic in its demands.¹ According to such accounts, Syria has been portrayed as not ready to move on, fearful of progress if a deal became unavoidable. Syria's historical attachment to ideology and domestic concerns about regime legitimacy are thus cited as having obstructed the talks.

Both positions are too simplistic; a deeper analysis that considers a range of factors stemming from all parties is required to explain the failure of the peace talks. Moreover, the binary portrayals of Syria as pragmatic and cooperative on one hand, or ideological and obstructionist on the other, are neither helpful nor accurate. Six factors behind the failure of peace talks will be analyzed here, demonstrating that ideological and pragmatic considerations were coterminous in Syria's foreign policy in this period.

Syria as Spoilers and the Arabs' Separate Paths to Peace

Syrian intransigence is one of the oft-cited reasons for the failure of any talks Syria is involved in. Syria's singularity was especially striking given that, by 1996, all the other Arab parties that had been at war with Israel had opted for peace. Given that Syria was the only party refusing to sign, it seemed obvious to outsiders, and was indeed intimated by several key figures involved in the negotiation process, that Syria was the culprit behind the failed talks.²

And indeed the Oslo Accords, rather than being welcomed by the Syrians, came as a heavy blow to them. The Syrians expressed their disappointment by stating that they were "neither opposed to nor supportive"³ of the Oslo Accords—diplomatic speak for dissatisfaction at an outcome. In reality, the Syrians were said to be "furious."⁴ They were aware that the accord between the Palestinians and Israel effectively legitimized the normalization of relations between Israel and the rest of the Arab world, and, consequently, there appeared to be "no longer a compelling reason for the Arab states to continue to reject [Israel]."⁵ Worse still for Syria, it appeared to vindicate Egypt's much-maligned policy in the 1970s of being the first among the Arab nationalists to recognize Israel. With the Palestinians, the one group in the region with most right to be aggrieved by Israel, seemingly following Egypt's path, Syria was even

further isolated than it had been after the talks in the 1970s. As Avi Shlaim stated at the time, the result of this wider mood of acceptance of Israel was that “the rules of the game in the entire Middle East have radically changed.”⁶

From the US perspective, the Oslo Accords in fact increased the possibility of progress as it placed pressure on other parties to follow suit. Thus, inability to cooperate or compromise put the Syrians in an especially unfavorable light when compared with their Palestinian counterparts, whom Syria had always claimed to speak up for. Syria’s unease about the breakthrough in the other tracks has been interpreted as resentment that others had achieved peace first, and an interest in continued conflict for ideological and domestic political reasons.⁷

However, Syria’s opposition to the Oslo Accords was not purely due to it scuppering Syria’s policy of obstruction as was suspected by the United States, but because it undermined the hard-won premise of the Madrid talks that the goal should be a comprehensive settlement.⁸ It was this, not conflict with Israel at all costs, that motivated Syria. The Israeli-Palestinian deal immediately put Syria in a position similar to the one it had faced in the mid-1970s when Egypt moved at a much faster pace, and its compromises undercut Syria’s bargaining power.

Moreover, the notion that the Arabs would coordinate their strategies, to demonstrate to the United States and Israel that divisive tactics to sell the Arabs short would not work, was proved to be an empty promise. The eagerness of other Arab parties to strike deals for less than they had initially demanded conveyed the impression that those demands were merely rhetorical, which in turn gave Israel less reason to cooperate fully and deliver concessions. This had implications for all the Arab parties, not just the Palestinians.

While it was not publicly expressed at the time, Syria’s suspicion about Israel’s bilateral deal with the Palestinians, and fears that the latter had been too eager to sign what was not an equitable deal for the Arabs were justified over time when the details of the deal were released.⁹ It emerged that Israel still retained full control over at least 75 percent of Palestinian territory; only 3 percent of land was being returned to Palestinian control, and these were areas that Israel was not interested in keeping anyway.¹⁰ The growing fear among many Palestinians was that they had not so much compromised as accepted defeat to the Israelis and Zionism. As Rhynold explains:

On the Palestinian side, the dominant narrative continued to view Zionism as a colonial movement. This meant that peace, rather than being associated with justice, was associated with capitulation or at best pragmatism.¹¹

It was a fear shared by the Syrians, and thus their opposition to Oslo was also grounded in objective strategic concerns, not merely blind obstructionism. These factors helped to undermine the foundations that had initially persuaded Syria to join the Madrid talks in the first place; Rabinovich agrees that after Oslo, the “prospects for an Israeli-Syrian agreement diminished.”¹²

The notion that Syria was the more obstructionist party in negotiations is further countered by the number of Syrian concessions compared to Israel's, and the fact that none of the numerous pauses in the peace process was attributable to Syria. Baker acknowledged that it was Asad's acceptance of the Bush-Baker initiative that induced Shamir to relent and agree to attend the Madrid conference,¹³ whereas Shamir was described as “obstinate and unyielding.”¹⁴ Brent Scowcroft, Bush's National Security Advisor, was reported to have thought that any initiative would fail because “Israel was the main stumbling block to peace.”¹⁵ Of all the parties, Asad was the only one to mirror the Israelis as a difficult negotiator, frugal with his concessions—hence, in the early stages, Washington relied on Asad's example of cooperation to make the Israelis rethink their strategy of intransigence, warning that Israel, not Syria, would be blamed for scuppering the peace process if it refused to compromise.¹⁶ Much of the perception of Syrian intransigence relates to its insistence on Israeli withdrawal to the pre-war boundaries of the Golan. It is true that on this point Syria was not willing to compromise, but withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied during the 1967 war was the one key condition Syria had maintained since that war. While Syria could not control the fate of the Palestinians, it could still hold firm on principles relating to its own territory. According to Aaron Miller, former Deputy Special Middle East Coordinator of the US State Department, it was not necessarily Syrian “intransigence” on this demand that was the obstacle in negotiations; rather, one of the problems with the Madrid negotiations was

Our inability to understand what would be required to reach an agreement. When Asad said 100 per cent [withdrawal from the Golan] he didn't mean 99 per cent. If he wanted 100 per cent, instead of talking him out of it, which is what we tried to do . . . we should accept [it] and change his view of the process.¹⁷

Delays

Peace talks do need time, but they also need momentum. Too many delays allowed other events to have an impact on proceedings, and allowed old suspicions to resurface. Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's chief negotiator

in the Israeli-Syrian talks, has noted that the delays came from the Syrian side. During the three and a half years of negotiations, Asad acted as if "time was no constraint," whereas "Rabin was insisting on a deal that would be completed in several years." Rabinovich also writes that Muallem complained that Peres after Rabin was "too bold and swift."¹⁸

The first comparison between Asad and Rabin is at odds with the account provided by numerous sources,¹⁹ including his own (later) admission that Asad "too cared about swift negotiations";²⁰ in contrast, Rabin is reported to have been cautious and slow moving. Overall, there were three periods of delays and procrastination attributable to the Israelis between 1992 and 1995: in December of 1992 after Rabin expelled the Palestinians; in September 1993, when Rabin wanted to be able to digest the deal with the Palestinians; and again in January 1994 after signing peace with Jordan. These factors prompted Sharaa to note: "it seems that the Israelis have not made up their mind firmly, and haven't committed themselves to a comprehensive peace."²¹

Although the Syrians too were capable of drawing out negotiations, in large part because of Asad's meticulous approach, on this occasion there was less need for delay on their part. Importantly, there was little ambiguity about their stated goals (full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan), and as such they were far more eager to see the implementation of the first stage of talks sooner. Indeed, in a meeting with Warren Christopher, Asad stated that he wanted the withdrawal to be completed within six months of the talks.²²

With regard to Syria's response to Peres, the accounts from all sides corroborate the view that Peres preferred to move at a fast pace. Muallem explains:

[Peres] was in a hurry—he wanted to enter the elections with the Syrian-Israeli agreement in his hand. He wanted to "fly high and fast," as he used to say. I used to tell the Israeli counterpart that it is important to fly but it is also important to know when and where to land . . .²³

Thus, the apparent discrepancy between accounts of Asad's urgency on the one hand and those of his hesitation on the other can be explained by the chronology of events. It is unsurprising that he reacted differently to Israel's contrasting approaches under Rabin and Peres. According to Martha Kessler, CIA officer and the US liaison at the peace talks, one of the problems in the negotiations was that at this stage there was "a huge rush, because the Clinton and Israeli governments were coming to the end of their terms."²⁴ Ultimately, Peres' urgency when he took over amounted to little, since he did not wait for the peace process to take its course and

called elections within three months. This did a great deal to halt the peace process that he had sought to speed up.

Apart from the deliberate suspension of talks, there were also unproductive phases of the talks that did much to delay proceedings and diminish the appetite for cooperation. In particular, the military-level discussions (COS I and II) added to the delays, particularly COS I, which was widely seen as a failure. The failure can be put down to four main reasons: first, the military leaders had no authority to make final decisions that had such weighty political implications—the exclusion of the political leaders was therefore ineffective and rendered the COS talks futile. Second, according to both Muallem and Rabinovich, the heads of their respective negotiating teams, the Israeli side went into these talks ill prepared, with Ehud Barak having only four days to prepare for what was being described as the breakthrough meeting.²⁵ Rabinovich stated that this was because the meeting was “held almost spontaneously”²⁶ (although why it should have been arranged in such a way when the request for the meeting had been initiated by Washington on Israel’s behalf remains unclear). Third, it appeared that Barak had his sights set on a political career. Not only was he due to retire at the end of the month anyway, but his future aims were influencing his demands during negotiations as he tried to calculate how the talks would impact on his election campaign.²⁷ And fourth, according to Dennis Ross, the premise of the talks was flawed because the two sides had differing goals in what they sought to achieve—Israel only wanted to lay out agreed aims, while the Syrian side also wanted to establish agreed-upon principles.²⁸

This divergence prevented movement forward with COS I, which was postponed in order to reengage the political delegations; COS II talks were then pushed to May 1995. The Syrian side perceived this as having been a deliberate delaying tactic from the Israelis since it was known all along that “officers on their own cannot reach a decision.”²⁹ It meant that almost a whole year had lapsed since the Israeli-Jordanian agreement before Syrian and Israeli leaders met again to resume talks.

As for the United States, it also played a part in these delays. According to Cobban, in 1994 Clinton was determined not to stop at the Jordanian-Israeli treaty but was impatient to move forward on the Syrian front.³⁰ Rabinovich also implies that the United States gave greater importance to the Syrian-Israeli track.³¹ But while Clinton did pay a visit to Damascus immediately after the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, these assessments do not seem to tally with two points: first, Clinton willingly surrendered a lot of the initiative in setting the agenda and timetable for negotiations to the Israelis. He was new to the complexities of the peace process and in large part leant on the experience of Rabin. Second, Washington facilitated numerous delays on the Syrian-Israeli track at Israel’s behest—they

always acquiesced with Israel's calls for postponement or suggested format of talks. Thus, even if Washington sensed the Syrian track should be given more attention, notably after the Israeli-Jordanian deal in 1994, they did not put much pressure on Israel to comply.

Ambiguity and Dispute over Terms of Agreement

The "Aims and Principles" document drawn up in most part by the Americans during the shuttle diplomacy of May 1995 was riddled with ambiguities. Given that this document was essential in salvaging the talks after the deadlock of the COS I discussions, and was to be the main foundation for discussions on security arrangements, such embedded ambiguity would prove to be a major problem for the peace process and was bound to resurface as a stumbling block further along in the process. The "aims" part of the document was designed to reduce the possibility of surprise attacks, border friction, and the danger of large-scale invasion or war—this chiefly addressed the concerns of the Israelis. Meanwhile, the "principles" part of the document stipulated that security had to be guaranteed equally *for all parties* (not at the expense of another), that the security arrangements had to be mutual and reciprocal, and in respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This acknowledged some of Syria's main concerns.³²

The first problem with the document arose with the "principles" section. The document was largely uncontroversial, except a caveat in Principle 2, which suggested that if equal and mutual security arrangements could not be achieved, then these would be addressed via *modifications* on one side or the other—in other words, Syria could be expected to take on a greater share of the security requirements to satisfy Israel's concerns. This partly depended on where the final line of Golan withdrawal would come to—something which was not yet agreed upon. Thus, important parts of the document were predicated on ambiguities, creating further confusion.

Such ambiguity aided Israel's strategy—indeed, this was characteristic of all Rabin's public communications with regard to the extent of Israeli withdrawal.³³ Damascus had been consistently clear that they would accept nothing less than full withdrawal and were not interested in any further interim agreements; Israel's demands on the other hand were less clear-cut from the beginning, and sprawled into more long-term aims concerning security, economic openness, and normalization, all of which were harder to define and achieve in the short term. Moreover, Israel wavered on what it was prepared to sacrifice—initially full withdrawal seemed a possibility

to Rabin, but as he was pressed to commit to this, he became increasingly swayed by the opposition this would incur among the Israeli public and political parties, both left and right wing. Domestic politics was ever a constraint in Israel's decisions, and it produced volatility and unpredictability in the leadership.³⁴ Thus, the real extent of progress in negotiations was always in question.

Why then did Syria display comparative eagerness to move forward when there was this level of uncertainty in Israel's commitment? This can partly be explained by the success of Israel's strategy, which was designed to allay both public fears and the suspicions of its Syrian counterparts. Rabin avoided being so equivocal as to halt proceedings, and to then be blamed for the failure. Moreover, Syria saw the initial acceptance by Israel to proceed on the basis of Resolution 242 as a key success, and opted for a strategy in which they would hold Israel to this starting point. Syria was therefore ready to call Israel's bluff, knowing the ambiguity would have to be exposed at some point and that Israel would be responsible.

A second problem with the document was related to the accuracy of assumptions that influenced the "aims" section of the document. This section alluded to Israel's concerns of possible attack, and it based its demands for normalization on this. However, Syria felt these concerns were an exaggeration of the reality.³⁵ On two occasions while the talks were under way, Israel had engaged in major military operations, launching air and ground offensives on Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, without any state response by its Arab neighbors. Based on precedent, the greatest threat of surprise attacks, war, or invasion in the region came not from Syria but in fact from Israel. Muallem further highlighted Israel's superiority "over any combination of Arab states," arguing:

They have nuclear bombs, the most advanced arms and technology. American arms and supplies and technology are completely open to them. Israel manufactures 60 per cent of its needs in military equipment and is the fifth [biggest] arms exporter in the world. Yet despite all this, they used to tell us they were afraid of Syria. We did not believe this, and we kept asking ourselves the motive behind this exaggeration.³⁶

Syria also questioned Israel's attempts to change the basic parameters of an agreement, which seemed to be written into the "Aims and Principles" document via the caveat permitting *modifications* to security agreements. One such modification, the early warning station on the Golan, was considered to be a clear infringement of sovereignty, "as if they wanted to spy on us from our own territory—and this in a situation of peace, not a situation

of war”; moreover, Israel demanded that all the area reaching just south of Damascus should be demilitarized, which would have meant “you open the capital to them.”³⁷

Rabinovich offered an alternative account, that the reason why talks stalled was not Israel’s alterations in the terms of agreement, but Syria’s failure to deliver on Israel’s security conditions. In his diaries, Rabinovich quoted the following statement from Asad:

Many issues that constituted the elements of peace were still pending. These issues include the elements of security and other elements, and all of them are basic. The security issues might make the regained land something that is not worthwhile, and also might discount dignity and rights.³⁸

Rabinovich interpreted this as an acknowledgment by Asad that Israel had fulfilled its side of the bargain (pertaining to land return) but Syria had not fulfilled its side, pertaining to security issues. It is true that Israel’s demands had not been met, more of which will be discussed shortly. However, the notion that Israel had fulfilled its side of the bargain needs to be scrutinized here. First, the one key demand from Syria was full withdrawal from the Golan. But the Israeli negotiating team spent much of its time trying to reframe its initial acceptance of this term, and seeking to convince its public that *no* firm commitment had been made. Second, even if Israel had given a (conditional) commitment to withdraw, then this was negated by two key points: (a) Israel still sought an early warning system and sought to situate Israeli troops on the Golan; (b) whatever commitment Rabin had given became irrelevant when Israel proposed that it would have to be put to a national referendum in Israel—the negative outcome of which was predictable.

What, then, of the security arrangements and issues surrounding normalization referred to by Rabinovich, which were encapsulated in Israel’s “aims” in the document, and which were indeed included in Syria’s own proposed terms at the start of the talks? Though the talks never reached this stage of the “four-legged” agenda, its inclusion of them has been cited as evidence that Syria was willing to forego its ideological enmity with Israel in return for peace and land. But this is questionable since here too there was a dispute in the interpretation of this aim and the timing of its implementation.

First, Israel expected an end to the economic boycott of Israeli goods and businesses, and an opening up of borders to Israeli investment and tourism. Israel sought comprehensive recognition in political, diplomatic, economic, and cultural terms. Second, Israel expected the change to be

swift. Syria refused to accommodate these expectations on two counts—(1) the Syrian public would not abide such a change:

You can't oblige [the public] to buy Israeli goods or visit Israel if they are not convinced that Israel has changed from being an enemy to a neighbour . . . we cannot be obliged to make the peace warm.³⁹

(2) The time frame was unrealistically fast, while complete openness would not be equitable for Syria's economy: They wanted open borders, open markets for their goods and so on. This would have had an obvious effect on our economy. Our economic regulations are not against them; we do not open our markets to any country.⁴⁰

For Israel's part, the demands seemed realistic based on historical precedence, perhaps justifiably so, for these were the same terms that Sadat had almost unquestioningly accepted almost 20 years earlier. For Syria, the same route was not an option—Sadat had sacrificed public opinion and Egypt's autonomy in doing so, two core principles of Arab nationalist ideology. It was not a sacrifice Syria was prepared to make, even in return for the Golan.⁴¹ Any deal had to fulfill Syria's ideological criteria. Thus, on all four aspects of the agenda for peace talks, there was discrepancy between Syria's and Israel's expectations. Israel was not prepared to offer full withdrawal, and Syria was not prepared to offer full normalization, and both states—via their governments and public opinion—were driven by ideology in their policies.

Leaks and Public Opinion

As was outlined in Chapter 7 the leaks during negotiations on the Israeli side, and the subsequent inflaming of public opinion against the peace process had a significant impact on the outcome of the talks: First, the leaks undermined Syrian confidence in the Israeli negotiators, due to the probability that the leaks came from someone present at the talks, and also the inability of the leaders to crack down on those leaks seemed to indicate a lack of seriousness on their part—To what extent did the public outcry in fact play into Israel's strategy? It was notable that in other high-level negotiations, for example, for the Oslo agreement, there had been no such leaks in the run-up to its announcement.⁴² There was thus a suspicion that whenever Israel was not enthusiastic about the terms of a deal undergoing negotiation, leaks of information would help to sabotage the deal. Second, concern over public opinion was the main reason for Rabin's regular requests for postponement in order to allow the Israeli public to "digest" the developments in other tracks of the negotiations. Third,

Peres' early elections call, which ultimately broke off the talks, came on the back of Labor's narrowing lead in the polls and increased support for the right-wing Likud, as well as a calculation of how the public would react to a potential Syrian-Israeli deal if it advanced before the elections.

Given the apparent ease with which Egypt and later Jordan and the Palestinians were able to agree deals with Israel regardless of popular opinion, why was the Syrian-Israeli track so susceptible to it? While the Golan was a huge prize, particularly on a personal level for Asad under whose watch it was lost in the first place, Syria was not willing to cross public opinion in order to regain it. This was in part connected to the precariousness of a minority regime, and thus domestic politics played some part in this. But, moreover, the Syrian public was opposed to regaining land if the deal was not equitable and at the expense of the country's dignity. Particularly because previous peace treaties between other Arab states and Israel had fallen so far short of Arab demands, peace had now become synonymous with accepting defeat to Israel in the eyes of the Arab public. Thus, even if ideology had become an irrelevant factor for the region's leaders, this was not the case among the public. When James Baker was trying (and failed) to secure Syria's agreement to an early proposal for the format of talks, he asked in frustration what Syria "had to lose" in agreeing. To this, Asad gave the very telling reply:

We will lose Arab domestic public opinion . . . they will know what is going on. This would not only be adventurism, it would be a form of suicide. It is one thing to adopt a suicidal policy if it brings benefits to the people, but it is truly foolhardy if there is no positive result.⁴³

This in many ways sums up the close connection between Syria's adherence to ideological principles, and the role of Syrian public opinion. Asad was willing to be pragmatic, but being pragmatic in his view was to stay close to public opinion in the Arab-Israeli conflict—an ideological stance in this case was also in Syria's best interests. Even from a realist viewpoint, this was an effective balancing strategy: Syria's adherence to ideology and unwillingness to compromise its ideational and strategic interests confronted and tested Israeli public opinion and ideology in a way that no other Arab parties did during the Madrid talks.

Israel's intransigence was a winning formula against other Arab states, which had discarded their own ideological policies. But with Syria holding firm to its demands for full withdrawal before any conditions could be delivered, Israel's leaders were forced to consider a level of compromise that had not been required of them previously. Israeli public opinion became so exercised on the Syrian-Israeli track precisely because there

was far less Arab compliance than had been offered on the other tracks. Almost mirroring Syria's adherence to ideology, there was a strong current of ideological fervor running deep not just in Israeli politics but also in society; there were red lines that neither the Left or Right of the Israeli public divide were willing to sacrifice.⁴⁴ In the period of the COS II talks, a poll was conducted by Tel Aviv University's Tami Steinmetz Center—46.5 percent of Israelis objected to any withdrawal from the Golan, while another 34.8 percent wanted only a partial withdrawal.⁴⁵

To deal with this public opposition, Rabin devised three approaches to the peace talks: ambiguity as mentioned above, secrecy, and a slow drawn-out pace.⁴⁶ The first two were designed to put the public off the track of agreements being made, while the latter was supposed to help the public gradually get used to any small concessions made. Thus, it was this fear of public opinion that contributed to the delays that did so much to undermine the process. While in Syria the fear of alienating public opinion was tied to a dual fear of revolution and of loss of ideological credibility, Israel's fear of losing public opinion was tied to a fear of losing power at the ballot box. As Muallem states:

Peres' decision to call early elections must have depended on pressures from within his own party, because the margin between Labor and Likud had started to narrow in the polls.⁴⁷

Later, Muallem stated:

Israel believed that you can push a button to make peace warm, to direct Syrian popular attitudes from a state of war to a state of peace. This is not logical, especially when it is rare to find a household in Syria that has not lost someone on the battlefield. It is always necessary to educate and inform the people.⁴⁸

Rabin's strategy of gradually releasing information to the public, thereby mitigating the impact of opposition, ultimately failed. Rather, Israel's approach followed a pattern of high secrecy, followed by dramatic leaks to the public at an advanced stage of negotiations, giving the government no chance to prepare the ground. And even when government officials sought to inform the public openly, notably the public statements by Peres, the manner and timings were so sudden as to evoke even more public emotion and hostility to talks.

Individuals versus Political System

It would be easy to attribute certain periods of progress or deadlock to the personalities of the different leaders. While Shamir comes in for a lot of

criticism in US reports, Rabin is portrayed as being very compliant; thus, the peace process is widely seen to have progressed in large part because of Rabin. It is true that the leaders did have an impact on the direction of negotiations, but whether the impact was substantive or merely procedural is debatable. First, the different leaders often had different priorities or views on how to proceed with negotiations—Shamir was un-conducive to any peace settlement that would require compromise of any territory by Israel. In contrast, Rabin indicated that he agreed with a land-for-peace approach (thus a substantive change) but favored dealing with each track separately and one at a time. Even after having decided this, he changed his view, switching from the Syria-first policy, which he started out with, to prioritizing the Palestinian track.⁴⁹ Conversely, Peres favored dealing with all the tracks simultaneously (but still bilaterally).⁵⁰ Arguably, this was closer to the notion of a comprehensive peace settlement envisioned by the Syrians, but this merely had a procedural impact, not a substantive one. Moreover, by this stage, a number of the parties on the Arab side had already concluded deals with Israel, and the incentive for joint bargaining and consultation was running thin on the ground.

But regardless of the leader, what ultimately made it almost impossible for Israel to be flexible was that (a) the government deemed itself to be so constrained by the weight of public opinion, and (b) given this was the case, the high number of leaks from the Israeli government to the press meant that a number of opportunities for progress failed because of Israeli public opposition.⁵¹ The leaks almost certainly were designed to have that effect.

Looking beyond the Madrid talks, many have agreed, including the Syrian leadership at the time, that the reason for the lack of peace talks between 1996 and 2000 was largely the right-wing nature of the Likud Party and its leader Netanyahu.⁵² Muallem memorably stated that under Likud, "it was a dialogue of the deaf."⁵³ Certainly, Netanyahu's obstruction to negotiations is particularly apparent when compared with his predecessors, Rabin and Peres, and his successor Ehud Barak's resumption of talks when he came to power in May 1999.⁵⁴

Thus, of course, individuals play an important role, particularly in a process that becomes, by its secretive nature, very personalized. But their overall impact needs to be weighed against the norms and the systemic factors that create consistent conditions and obstacles, limiting all the leaders' decision-making options in the first place. For example, Cobban, writing in the early days of Barak's leadership, attributes too much causation to the agency of individual leaders. Netanyahu, she argues, derailed what she presents as an otherwise smooth and fairly successful process. She makes the argument that the peace process merely needed to be picked up from where it was left off under Peres, and that it had every chance of being

successful. But it would be worth remembering that it was Peres who suspended talks after the two bus bombings in Israel while it was Rabin before him who refused to move forward with Syrian talks after the Palestinian and Jordanian deals for fear of aggravating public criticism. The embedded ambiguity in the aims and principles of the talks was already creating problems under Rabin. And indeed, even after Netanyahu, Barak continued some of the most controversial policies of his predecessor such as settlement construction, and often turned to populist policies, despite his initial rhetoric that had suggested otherwise.⁵⁵

From this, we can see that there are evidently some constant restraints on Israeli political decision-making, especially in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, that transcend the different leaders. The instability and uncertainty of Israel's political system, and the regular turnaround of leaders make it difficult for them to pursue the issue of peace consistently without resorting to populist tactics to curry favor with the Israeli electorate.⁵⁶ The assassination of Rabin was a potent warning to future Israeli leaders not to give anything away in a compromise with the Arabs.

Israel's political system ultimately influenced both procedural *and* substantive aspects of the negotiations. The temporary nature of the terms and strategies on the Israeli side generated uncertainty for the future of any settlement being negotiated, and also placed Israel's interlocutors in doubt as to how to proceed. This then contributed to a lack of trust between the parties, an important component in any such negotiations. The lack of trust due to the internal uncertainty over Israel's government could be seen even during promising periods of negotiations.⁵⁷

Of course, Israel's democratic system cannot plausibly be seen as a reason behind the *failure* of the talks. Public debate, regular elections, and political accountability, which were all demonstrated during the negotiations process in Israel in marked contrast to Syria, affect the politics of all open societies. However, it is worth pointing out that Israel is unique in the polarized nature of its politics in the realm of foreign policy. In almost all other examples of democratic systems, there exists a broad consensus across party lines when it comes to major foreign policy decisions, precisely because policies in this area are more long term, and more may be at stake, particularly if it involves issues of international war or peace. Time is needed to see through a policy and not render the efforts of each outgoing government futile. Where there are changes to a foreign policy, the changes are phased in over a long period of time. In most cases where negotiations seeking resolution to conflict are under way, they are continued by the incoming government. The outcome may still be greatly affected by changes in personnel (the Bush-to-Clinton transition

is a good example of this), but overriding policy goals tend to remain the same.⁵⁸

Second, the potential swing in Israeli policy is greater due to the volatility of Knesset membership. Proportional representation, and the regular need for a coalition of many parties in order to form a government mean that the Israeli government is inherently weak in comparison with single-party governments in other democracies. As a result of the fluctuating personnel, the possibility for what might be described as hard-line, indeed radical, politicians to ascend to power is higher than in most places. This, in addition to the ideological inflexibility of individual leaders and lack of political will, often renders the pursuit of a long-term and complex foreign policy change as futile, and when it is pursued, it lacks the momentum and continuity needed to make it viable. Such systemic factors on the Israeli side had considerable impact on the talks.⁵⁹

Conflict

In early 1996, Palestinian militants opposed to the Oslo Accords carried out bomb attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets. Peres abruptly suspended his team's participation in the Syria talks, and unable to further act against the Palestinians, he followed this up by a series of attacks against Lebanon known as "Operation Grapes of Wrath"; shortly afterward, Peres was defeated in the general elections.⁶⁰ The fallout from the conflict led to a sharp deterioration in relations between not just Syria and Israel, but also Syria and the United States. The first question to ask is the following: How did this combustion between Israel and the Palestinians contribute to a breakdown in talks between Israel and Syria?

Cobban's explanation can be contested on two counts. First, she argues that Peres suspended talks on the Syrian track because of pressure from his party to refocus on the Palestinian track.⁶¹ The reasoning is improbable given that Israel suspended all talks, and its response was not to resume talks with the Palestinians but to take military action against both the Palestinians and Lebanon. In reality, Peres had just called an early election, and any deal with the Arabs would have faced major opposition from the Israeli public.⁶² Second, Cobban argues that Syria also terminated talks as it thought the attacks against Lebanon and the international conference against terrorism were aimed at the Syrians, and because there was "no reassurance to the contrary" conveyed by Washington to Damascus.⁶³

This is a straightforward self-interest-based explanation. But there is no evidence to suggest that such assurances would have placated Syria's anger at Israel's use of force against its neighbors, nor is it evident that it was only

concerns for Syria's own security that angered Damascus. Israel's assault on Lebanon not only was construed as an indirect threat to Syria, but also demonstrated Israel's continued belligerence in the region in Syria's eyes. When assessing the history of Syria's reactions to such events, it is apparent that Israel's use of military action—even if not directly targeting and affecting Syria—has always been enough to thwart Syrian engagement in any regional diplomacy.⁶⁴ Most accounts continue to seek motives of self-interest in Syria's refusal to condemn the attacks, or expel Hamas from its headquarters in Damascus. However, Lesch's explanation is more credible:

This is where Syria's traditional role at the vanguard of Arab nationalism and the rejectionist anti-Israel front and its oft-stated commitment to the Palestinian cause possibly hampered its ability to break out from this self-professed paradigm . . .⁶⁵

Thus, Syria's anger was not only an expression of its own state interests, as Cobban implies, but a reflection of Syria's continued adherence to ideological principles applied to the entire region. In turn, it had a significant impact on Syria's relations with the United States, not least because Washington was always seen to be too tepid in its condemnation of Israel's actions.

A second question to be asked is the following: Given that the Palestinian attacks certainly contributed to the ending of talks, to what extent were they the most important factor in the breakdown of the Madrid talks after five years of trying?

Numerous accounts in academic works, policy, and the media world have cited the attacks of 1996 as the most significant factor that killed off the talks.⁶⁶ Thus, the Arabs in general, the Palestinians in particular, and the Syrians by default were to blame for the eventual failure of talks. If it had not been for this event, Peres would not have suspended the talks, Netanyahu would not have been voted into power, while Washington would have applied more pressure on Israel to compromise for a final settlement with Syria.

While the attacks undoubtedly had an immediate short-term and dramatic impact on the talks, it would be simplistic to cite them as the only cause. The usual balancing between short-term and long-term factors needs to be adopted, as in any historical assessment. In this case, it would be just as possible to point to the inherent and structural flaws of the Oslo Accords,⁶⁷ or indeed it would be possible to point to Israel's continued illegal construction of settlements, both of which could be seen as significant factors building up to the events of 1996. Moreover, as this

chapter has sought to do, it is important to consider the ways in which the peace process on the Syrian-Israeli track had already been undermined and suffered a number of setbacks, which exposed the fragility of the process and wavering political will. Prior to the summoning of the Madrid conference, Israel had been under no pressure since 1973 to enter negotiations with Syria and to withdraw from the Golan—certainly not militarily; neither domestically from its own public, nor diplomatically from the United States either. It was not Israel that had called for a return to negotiations after the Gulf War; indeed, on the Syrian-Israeli track, it could be argued that Israel had the most to lose by cooperating. Given this was the case, the 1996 attacks that suspended the talks had in fact provided Israel with a reprieve, saving it from having to withdraw from the Golan and from defying Israeli public opinion. Thus, to see the flare-up of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as initiating the breakdown of the talks is a flawed analysis. Indeed, Rabinovich concedes that the peace process was already receding even by the time Rabin was assassinated.⁶⁸

What the renewed conflict did do, however, was to produce an altered set of conditions that had a significant impact on future events and developments. Other actors, particularly Hamas, previously marginal to the theater of the Madrid talks, now came to the fore. This pushed Syria closer to Hamas in its objectives, despite the difference between their respective secular and Islamist characters.

Conclusion

The above analysis allows us to assess the role of ideology in Syria's foreign policy more closely and how it has affected its relations with the United States. There are two arguments on opposite ends that need to be addressed. The first is that Syria remained driven by ideology and as a result was unchanging, intransigent, and unwilling to make compromises and was therefore at fault for the lack of progress when the talks broke down. This chapter has sought to demonstrate that this was not quite the case; while there were red lines that Syria was not willing to cross even for the sake of a momentous peace agreement, it was not wholly inflexible when Israel showed it too was willing to compromise. It would certainly be inaccurate to describe Syria as being obstructionist simply because it held on to its core principles (of which there were relatively few). In several cases, Damascus attempted to facilitate further progress and speed in the negotiations.

The second argument contends that since Syria *was* open to striking a deal with Israel, it was in fact willing to abandon ideology for the sake

of regaining its territory and establishing closer links with the United States. Thus, Syria's decisions are explained by materialist factors. Cobban states that Israel's conflict with Syria is "a classic political-military conflict between two established states," unlike the Israeli-Palestinian case, which involves issues of national identity, national values, and nonmilitary solutions.⁶⁹ However, while the negotiations may have served to portray the dispute between the two states to be merely territorial, the hostility was in reality deeper than that. The enmity was and is visceral, rooted in history, memory, perceptions, as well as material factors. Both sides wanted "peace" of a sort, but there was no great interest on either side to seriously resolve the ideological clash.

Some have highlighted the fact that Syria was at least willing to contemplate normalization of relations with Israel, something that had been unthinkable at any other stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But notably, the "peace" Syria was prepared to offer the Israelis in return was not spelled out. On this matter, Sharaa stated: "[H]ow can such a desirable objective logically be realized without eliminating occupation and restoring legitimate rights?"⁷⁰ It was for this reason that Syria was adamant to deal first, and only, with territorial issues, and showed little enthusiasm for the normalization that Israel sought.

For Israel's part, it sought all the other trappings of peace to benefit its own security and economy, but could not countenance returning the Golan, due not just to strategic reasons but also to an ideological belief that it rightly belonged to Israel. If Syria's policy were not similarly influenced by ideology, it is likely there would have been greater cooperation, and sooner, on other issues such as security, distribution of resources, arms control, and economic integration—particularly if Syria were aware that Israel would be more willing to withdraw from the Golan as a result. Egypt's example of a state discarding the constraints of ideology provides a comparable case of state behavior when strategic self-interests trump ideological principles. However, for Syria, as long as the conditions upon which its ideology was founded were still in place, ideology continued to be relevant. Even before the talks broke down, Asad, referring to Israel (and possibly implicating the United States as well), stated:

I believe that they want a dark future for us... I believe that the long-term goal of the others is to cancel what is called the Arabs, what is called Arabism... I mean cancelling our feelings as a nation, cancelling Arab feelings, cancelling pan-Arab identity. We, as Arabs, certainly reject this because... Arabism is not a commodity to trade in even though this is what others seek.⁷¹

The way in which external factors help to foster or alter the relevance of ideology can be seen from Syria's reactions to two separate trends in the 1990s. It could be argued that when its neighbors, especially the Palestinians, reached a rapprochement with Israel, which coincided with a global systemic change and the onset of US unipolarity, Syria's ideological zeal was briefly dampened. It is evident that there was a degree of bandwagoning, with pressure felt by the Syrians to comply with US demands.

However, external factors also helped reinvigorate Syrian ideology, namely the renewed hostilities between Israel and those Palestinian radical groups that emerged stronger as a result of the peace process and the loss of the PLO's legitimacy. Instead of condemning the attacks or expelling the various Palestinian organizations from their bases in Damascus—among them Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinians—Syria appeared to gain renewed purpose in its own ideological campaign against Israel. The alliance and support that had been lost with the Oslo Accords and the formation of the Palestinian Authority was replaced with a strong alliance with those groups that were now seen to be closer to the Arab nationalist, anti-Zionist spirit. Given the option between pursuing the realist-statist route that had been carved out by its Arab neighbors and upon which Syria had unwittingly embarked itself, and the path of ideological "resistance" that seemed to have been reignited with the breakdown of the Madrid process, Syria chose the latter.

This in turn had a concomitant impact on Syria's relations with the United States. Syria had attempted to improve its relations with the United States in response to the Bush administration's efforts to end its isolation. But under Clinton it became evident that, as Miller stated, "the Road to Washington is through Israel—full stop."⁷² This was corroborated by Rabinovich, who argued that the United States felt "Israeli-Syrian peace could be a prelude to an American-Syrian rapprochement."⁷³ Such a policy overlooked the extent of Syria's ideological opposition with Israel—hence, rather than improve Syrian-American relations, Israel's reciprocal inflexibility and Washington's mediation merely served to increase Syria's mistrust of the United States. Moreover, Syria's increased support for organizations on the US terror list made any rapprochement between the two states even more unlikely. Had Syria sought closer ties with the United States, the Madrid peace talks presented it with the optimum opportunity after years of estrangement, and yet it is notable that Syria made a deliberate decision to regroup with other "resistance" forces despite the likely consequences, rather than opt for a more US-friendly strategy. Power-political considerations were certainly at play, but the role of ideology in driving Syria's decisions at this time, in consistency with its long-term policy, cannot be discarded.

Notes

1. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 211.
2. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 449, felt Asad wanted the peace talks to work “without any concessions on his part”; Christopher stated that Asad “failed to rise to the challenge” of Israel’s overtures of peace; see: *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 223; Albright, *Madame Secretary*, pp. 481–482; Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *Foreign Policies*, p. 155; Author’s interview with Andrew Tabler (Advisor, The Washington Institute for the Near East Policy, Former media consultant for Syrian NGOs), Washington, DC, May 2009.
3. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 60.
4. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 332.
5. Avi Shlaim, “The Oslo Accord,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 23 (3) (Spring 1994), pp. 24–40.
6. Ibid.
7. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *Syria and Iran* p. 71
8. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 332.
9. See Mark Zeitoun, *Power and Water in the Middle East: The Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict* (I.B. Tauris, 2008); Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, 205—this view was also shared by many in the Arab world in the months following the Oslo Accords, which agreed self-rule for only two Palestinian cities, the Gaza Strip and Jericho. Even so, some parts of the cities were to remain under Israeli control. The Palestinians would only have limited governing authority in the West Bank. The signs of the future breakdown of Oslo were apparent at the infamous map-signing ceremony in Cairo, on May 4, 1994, when Arafat initially refused to sign the maps demarcating Palestinian lines in the two aforementioned cities. An interim agreement (known as Oslo II) was signed in October 1995, which provided for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from nine cities in the West Bank, but its implementation was interrupted by Rabin’s assassination. In addition to territorial issues, the distribution of access to water and economic terms proved to be heavily weighted in Israel’s favor.
10. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 336.
11. Jonathan Rhynold, “The Failure of the Oslo Process,” *Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, 76 (2008), pp. 10–11.
12. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 56.
13. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 371.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 415.
16. Ibid., 469.
17. Author’s interview, Dr. Aaron Miller—former Deputy Special Middle East Coordinator, US State Department (1993–2000), Washington, DC, June 2009.
18. Rabinovich, *Brink of Peace*, p. 9.
19. See Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, p. 536; Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 75; Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 85.

20. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 73.
21. Cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 75, interview with Sharaa, Damascus 1998.
22. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, pp. 222.
23. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 86.
24. Author's interview with Martha Kessler, Washington, DC, May 2009.
25. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 66.
26. Rabinovich, cited in Ibid.
27. Muallem, cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 66.
28. Ibid.
29. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, interview with Sharaa, Damascus 1998.
30. Ibid., pp. 64–65.
31. Rabinovich, *Brink of Peace*, p. 55.
32. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, pp. 68–69.
33. Ibid., p. 70; Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, p. 536; such was the ambiguity that Rabin operated under that even Peres was surprised to learn the extent of withdrawal that Rabin had initially agreed to, when being briefed by Clinton after Rabin's death—see Ibid., p. 553.
34. Benjamin Miller, "The State-to-Nation Balance: A Key to Explaining Difficulties in Implementing Peace—The Israeli-Palestinian Case," in Guy Ben-Porat (Ed.), *The Failure of the Middle East Peace Process* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 39–69.
35. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 86.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Rabinovich, *Brink of Peace*, p. 12—quoting Asad's comments to Arab delegation, August 13, 1997, in *Haaretz*.
39. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 86.
40. Ibid.
41. Hence, Asad was taken aback by Peres' insistence that "normalization" and economic cooperation were crucial—see: Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 73.
42. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 199.
43. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 448–449.
44. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 39.
45. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 80.
46. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 199.
47. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 82.
48. Ibid., p. 86.
49. Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, p. 198.
50. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 6.
51. In April 1991 (Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 449).
52. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, 6; Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime*, pp. 226–227.
53. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 84.
54. Cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 5—Seale and Barak interview, June 23, 1999, published by *Al-Hayat*.
55. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 365–376.

56. Rabinovich refers to the challenges of the political changes in *The Brink of Peace*, 5; also highlighted as a significant challenge in author's interview with Kessler, May 2009.
57. Author's interview with Martha Kessler, Washington, DC, May 2009.
58. As seen with the transition from a Conservative to a Labour government during the Northern Ireland peace process in the UK.
59. Shimson Bichler, "Between Capitalism and Jewish Voters: Electoral Economics in Israel, 1977–1997," in J. W. Wright Jr. (Ed.), *Structural Flaws in the Middle East Peace Process* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 200–223.
60. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 4.
61. Ibid.
62. This is supported by Shlaim's account, which gives greater weight to Israel's domestic considerations as a factor behind Peres' decision. See: *Iron Wall*, p. 557.
63. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 11.
64. See, for example, the disruption of the disengagement talks in Chapter 5.
65. Lesch, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 339.
66. Rabinovich argues that the suicide bombings were the single most important factor in bringing Likud into power and ending the chances of peace—see: *Waging Peace*, pp. 74–75.
67. See: Jonathan Rhynold, "Realism, Liberalism and the Collapse of the Oslo Process: Inherently Flawed or Flawed Implementation?," in Ben-Porat (Ed.), *The Failure of the Middle East Peace Process?*, p. 128; Wright Jr., *Structural Flaws*.
68. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, pp. 70–71.
69. Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 12.
70. *New York Times*, November 1, 1991, A10: Cited in Cobban, *Peace Talks*, p. 17.
71. FBIS, October 12, 1995, pp. 50–61, "Radio on Al-Assad *Al Ahram* Interview," cited in Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, p. 70.
72. Author's interview with Miller, June 2009.
73. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, pp. 50–51.

Conclusions

Understanding Syrian-US Relations and the Potential for Change

This book has brought together different periods in the history of US-Syrian relations to identify recurring patterns across time, and to make sense of junctures of potential change. The first two parts of the book focused on the confrontational nature of US-Syrian relations—resilient even in the face of many changes within the region and Arab bandwagoning with the United States. The next two parts focused on episodes of greater engagement between the two states, although those instances were ultimately short-lived.

The analysis was guided by a set of questions posed at the start of the book, the overarching two being the following: Why has Syria persistently opposed the United States, and to what extent has the United States contributed to their mutual hostility? To some extent, these questions characterize US-Syrian relations as linear and fixed, whereas in reality they have been far more complex than that. Nevertheless, the episodes of cooperation have been less frequent than the periods of mistrust or outright hostility, which have been the more continuous features of US-Syrian relations.

Much of the blame for Syrian-American tensions has been attributed to Syria acting as a “spoiler” against US policy in the region. It is the case that during the Cold War, Syria refused to accept US aid after independence, or to participate in US-led regional alliances such as the Middle East Command and instead struck an alliance with the Soviet Union. It was the most vocal in its criticism of the United States, led the boycott of the United States after 1967, and gave its backing to Iran after 1979. Therefore, it might appear that Syria was opposed to the United States at all costs. However, Syria had not always set out to disrupt US strategy in the region—Syria initially had a highly positive view of the United States in the interwar period as it was seen to be opposed to exploitation of the Middle East by the European powers. Years later, Syria also demonstrated its willingness to engage in negotiations with the potential of compromise. This was demonstrated after Hafez Asad came to power in 1970 with the acceptance of resolutions 242 and 338, during the disengagement talks after 1973, and

particularly in the run-up to and during the Madrid peace process in the 1990s.

In that Syria was one of the Arab parties that remained most consistent in its demands, it could indeed be seen as a spoiler for US strategy in the region. But whereas this has often been presented as willful and irrational disruption, an alternative look at the situation provides a more rational explanation of Syria's position. Thus, rather than view Syria as a purely obstructionist party with no constructive goals of its own, it is more accurate to see Syria as having pursued its own principles and goals for the region, which in contradicting those of Israel's set it on a collision course with the United States.

What then of Washington's policies that contributed to US-Syrian hostility? Syria's animosity stemmed from three key American approaches: (1) a tendency to marginalize Syria in regional issues based on lasting Cold War perceptions of Syrian intransigence and expectations of blind opposition to the United States; (2) clear preferential treatment of Israel, and protection of Israeli interests, which directly undermined Syrian and Arab aspirations; and (3) an expectation that Arab parties would and should carry the burden of concessions in the Arab-Israeli dispute, and would eventually forget their grievances against US policy if enough financial, military, and political incentives were provided.

In the early stages of the Cold War, US interventionism (exemplified in the Syrian-American crisis in 1957) was the biggest contributor to Syrian hostility, but after the 1967 war, Washington's support for Israel became the overriding factor behind US-Syrian tensions. Massive increases in arms sales and financial aid to Israel under Kennedy and Johnson, and a shift in strategy under Nixon, which twinned Israel to US security interests, demonstrated to the Arab parties that their goals were seen as secondary to those of Israel. Israeli intransigence during negotiations, though at times frustrating for Washington, did not result in American diplomatic pressure or isolation, as it did for the Arab parties. As for US expectations of the Arabs carrying the greater share of concessions, it meant that when Syria did not relent to Washington's incentives (unlike Egypt), it was seen in a particularly negative light.

In relation to this last approach of the United States, it is arguable that it overestimated the potential for Egypt to influence other states in the region. This led to heightened, and indeed unrealistic, expectations that the Arab parties would comply in search of similar financial and political incentives as those received by Egypt on the back of its truce with Israel in 1978. The United States failed to take account of the histories of different Arab states and the strength of public opinion against any rapprochement with Israel, and also maintained an uncritical look at Sadat's decisions.

Herein lie some of the answers as to why Syria did not pursue the same path as Egypt, despite both previously sharing many similar traits. The case of Egypt, with its “pragmatism” and apparent interests in peace, was often used by the United States to castigate what in comparison appeared to be Syrian obstinacy. However, Egypt’s pursuit of peace with Israel was by no means a success for peace in the region: the tactic of isolating noncompliant actors, such as Syria and the Palestinians, only served to exacerbate their conflict with Israel, and their estrangement from the United States. Meanwhile, Israel’s boldness in taking unilateral measures and its military position in the region were strengthened, fostering deeper resentment against it; conversely, though Egypt now had the ear of the United States, its stature in the region was greatly undermined due to a loss of Arab nationalist credibility. In that sense, Syria’s refusal to side with Egypt over its alliance with the United States, and a refusal to accept the same financial and military incentives that had been offered to Egypt were ideological but also reflected pragmatism in terms of public opinion and strategic consequences for the region.

Washington’s approach reflects its misdiagnosis of the region in general and of Syria in particular. The notion that military and economic capabilities, or geopolitical factors such as territorial gain and resources are the main motivating factors or the only determinants of power in the region grossly underestimated the importance and power of ideas. This underestimation meant that Syria’s role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and its ability to affect the politics of the region were often dismissed on the ground that it lacked many of the above capabilities and assets, and yet its *ideological* weight had not been taken into consideration sufficiently.

Syria’s ability to act independently, despite lacking in economic, military, or geopolitical power, had been regularly overlooked. While it would be far-fetched to suggest that Syria did not need the backing of more powerful allies in the region (it did and still does), its willingness to act alone even when facing diplomatic isolation has been notable throughout the periods under study in the book. Thus, it is not possible to reduce Syrian opposition toward the United States and Israel to a simple product of a balance-of-power system; the notion that Syria was merely bandwagoning with Egypt and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, or latterly with Iran, erroneously overlooks the ideational component in Syria’s foreign policy, which it has often pursued even when that has resulted in a disagreement with its more powerful allies.

A significant explanation behind Syria’s regular opposition toward the United States until the death of Hafez Asad lies in its historical attachment to ideological principles. Its opposition to US interventionism and support for Israel was not only borne out of a power-political strategy,

but a political thought that prioritized Arab independence and freedom from external domination—it should be emphasized that this does not rule out “realist” goals, many of which in Syria’s case are coterminous with its ideational goals. Oftentimes, Washington contributed directly to Syria’s mistrust by its interventionist policies, its overt bias toward Israel, and its marginalization of Syria (and the Palestinians) in regional politics. Washington often exacerbated the situation by failing to understand the roots of Syrian opposition and dismissing it as pro-Soviet bias, irrationality, or xenophobia. The overall outcome of this was the increased salience of ideology for Syria as a framework for countering US hegemony and its support for Israel.

Theoretical Frameworks

While a historical approach has been at the heart of this study, the role of theory in organizing the analysis and framing the vital questions should not be overlooked. Theory can play a constructive role, in historical analysis, and particularly in opening up the study of the Middle East to non-regionalists in the academic discipline. However, rather than provide all-encompassing explanations, theories in any study should merely act as a tool to organize and structure one’s arguments and findings in a more systematic way; to enable one to move beyond very specific, *sui generis* explanations in order to provide broader conclusions about a case study; and to facilitate comparative studies with other cases from different historical and geographical contexts.

The introduction highlighted the methodological difficulties in the discipline of International Relations associated with ideological explanations; to provide such an explanation often implies irrationality on the part of the leaders on the one hand, or assumes instrumentalization of ideology for the sake of manipulating the masses. Both positions are plausible, but fail to account for the possibility that ideology and pragmatism could be compatible in a given foreign policy. Moreover, the notion that ideological policies can also serve and support both “realist” interests such as state security, and a so-called “liberal” motive of reflecting popular opinion is often overlooked as untenable. Clearly, what is needed is a more nuanced approach in the study of ideas in foreign policy, particularly in relation to Middle East politics; this book has sought to operationalize such an approach through the case of Syrian-American relations.

Taking a first key step toward such an approach, this study defined the political goals of Syria’s ideology, beyond the numerous generalizations regarding Arab nationalism prevalent in much of the literature.

This entailed recognition of the flexibility, adaptability, and evolution of ideologies over time, while still retaining their core goals. Moreover, the importance of understanding and defining an ideology according to its *practical* manifestation, beyond just its theoretical or intellectual face, was highlighted.

Given Syria's Ba'athist history, the intellectual writings of Michel Aflaq and Salah al-din Bitar were a key source for identifying Syria's core ideological goals, these being Arab independence and autonomy, freedom from external domination, and opposition to colonialism; crucially, they gained relevance through Syria's *foreign policy*, rather than its domestic context. These theoretical goals were also corroborated by a more popular sociopolitical movement in Syria, which manifested core Arab nationalist sentiments in its political activism. Part I analyzed the historical and practical emergence of ideological politics in Syria during the interwar and postindependence phases. Thus, both the intellectual and practical expressions of Arab nationalism were analyzed to distill the most important goals of the ideology.

The second step toward a more rigorous framework for understanding the role of ideology was to integrate key questions throughout the analysis, scrutinizing periods of critical foreign policy dilemmas. Returning to these questions demonstrates the extent to which Syria was willing to forego and sacrifice financial, military, or power-political advantages in order to adhere to its ideological principles:

1. How did Syria respond to high levels of US pressure?

Chapters 1–6 highlighted periods in which the United States applied significant levels of diplomatic pressure on Syria to comply with its policies. For example, it withdrew its ambassador and imposed an arms embargo since 1967, terminated all trade and placed greater sanctions on Syria in 1979, and generally encouraged its allies in the region to isolate Syria, and yet Syria did not abandon its ideological principles in the face of this pressure.

2. How did Syria respond when it faced isolation from its neighbors?

When compared with other states, for example, Jordan, which at varying times faced similar threats and capitulated to US pressure, Syria persisted with policies that opposed the United States. Similarly, with regard to the loss of previous ideological allies, Syria was in most cases not put off from its position; in fact, isolation pushed Syria closer toward other allies who would support it in its goals—this was evident when Egypt under

Nasser was increasingly distancing itself from the Palestinian cause, and particularly when Egypt and Jordan pursued a pro-American course.

3. How did Syria respond when faced with financial incentives to comply with the United States?

While Syria resisted the pressure from sanctions and use of the “stick” by the United States, it also demonstrated that it would not be swayed by Washington’s use of the “carrot” either. Financial incentives were either put on the table in return for greater ties with the United States (e.g., through the Point Four program under Truman) or were known to be forthcoming based on the experiences of other states. Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states all received US aid after showing willingness to facilitate US policy in the region—Egypt in particular received, after Israel, the greatest amount of aid and economic support as a reward for its change from an Arab nationalist stance to a pro-American one. Almost all the participants in the coalition against Iraq in the Gulf War in 1991 also received aid in return for their support. Syria in contrast did not receive aid from the United States on any occasion and was not persuaded to abandon its ideological goals, despite being in need of such investment.

4. How did Syria react to apparent failures in its ideological goals?

When Syria faced apparent failure in the outcome of some of its ideological goals, it did not necessarily lead to a decline in the continued salience of ideology. The following might be seen to indicate a lack of success in Syria’s foreign policies: the growing military and political strength of Israel; Israel’s victories in 1948 and 1967; Israel’s noncompliance with UN resolutions; Israel’s refusal to withdraw from Arab land and lack of concessions in negotiations; the worsening plight of the Palestinians; the breakup of the United Arab Republic; Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights; and the consolidation of US hegemony in the region. And yet this did not deter Syria from its Arab nationalist position. If ideology had been adopted as a route to regional power and geopolitical gains, these examples indicate that it should have been abandoned in light of its failure to deliver. However, this was not the case, and indeed Syria’s ideological commitment often increased in response to defeat.

There certainly were examples when Syria was willing to cooperate with the United States and offer concessions in the “peace process,” but most of these instances did not contradict Syria’s ideological principles. However, the above method also enabled us to consider instances when ideology did appear to be on the wane—Chapter 7 provided an important case

study of Syrian cooperation, which arguably *did* compromise its ideological principles. It cooperated with the United States against Iraq, a fellow Arab state—and even though Damascus argued that this was to protect the sovereignty of Kuwait, it did not absolve the fact that it had aided an external power to intervene in the region. Also, for all its calls for a comprehensive peace, Syria appeared to give in to the separate peace strategy toward the end of the peace talks in the mid-1990s, in return for its own territory. Damascus seemed to envisage the possibility of peace with Israel, albeit uncomfortably. Hence, Syria's ideological commitment highlighted above appeared to diminish at some stages in the 1990s.

There were two possible ways of viewing this shift—one was to see it as a unilateral decision by Hafez Asad to discard ideology for a dramatic change of course, similar to the decision taken by Anwar Sadat. Such an assumption is highly dubious given Asad's caution and pragmatism, his own personal identification with Syria's ideology, and historical precedence. A better explanation for the above changes necessitates a consideration of the wider context in which Asad's decisions were made, and recognition of the *contingency* of ideological salience in foreign policy.

Explaining Ideological Salience in Syrian Foreign Policy

To understand Syria's foreign policy behavior, the contexts in which ideology was deemed to be important, as well as the conditions that diminished the salience of ideology for Syria's foreign policy, both require analysis. This recognition of contingency avoids a deterministic account of US-Syrian relations—one that characterizes Syria's policy as somehow always being destined to reflect ideological principles. This certainly is not the case. If, therefore, Syria's adherence to ideology is contingent and changeable, what factors is it contingent on?

The case studies taken in this book demonstrate that identity, internal sources of state policy, and geopolitical and global systemic factors, all need to be taken into account when attempting to understand the salience of ideology. Furthermore, viewed through a constructivist lens, how those factors in turn contributed to the construction and embedding of ideas and norms over time also aids our understanding. Each historical period covered in this study should not be viewed separately, but rather as progressive stages in a process of increasing mistrust between Syria and the United States. If circumstances change to disturb that process, the role of ideology in Syria's policy toward the United States need not be fixed and may dissipate. But if events continue to incrementally build on historical experiences that rooted the importance of ideology in the first place, ideological

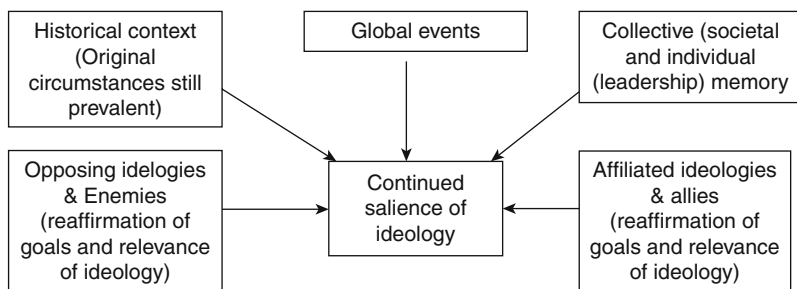


Figure 1.1 The contingency of ideological salience over time

norms will remain. This framework allows for the possibility that these norms, and thereby US-Syrian relations, might change—but first the necessary conditions would need to change. These conditions were mapped out in the introduction with Figure 1.1.

Syria's policy toward the United States was contingent on the factors shown in Figure 1.1, which either perpetuated or reduced the importance of ideology for Syria's foreign policy toward the United States.

- (i) **Historical context:** This was perpetuated, for Syria at least, throughout the periods under study in this book. As outlined in Chapter 1, the importance of ideology in Syrian foreign policy emerged with the European mandate system, and was continued with the establishment of Israel and American interventionism. In Part II, this major source of Syrian ideology did not recede but in fact was exacerbated after the 1967 war, when the Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip were all occupied. This salience of ideology for Syria was continued in the period studied in Part III: while Egypt was able to regain the Sinai after the disengagement talks, the continued occupation of the Golan Heights and Palestinian territories meant the Syrian "struggle" against its enemies was still very much alive. Ideology was supposed to act as a guide and framework for making decisions in the face of such struggles, and as a result it remained highly relevant as long as Israel still held Arab territory.
- (ii) **Opposition:** Syria did not operate its ideological policies in a vacuum; rather, it was mirrored by those that it opposed. Part I demonstrated that the United States was strongly influenced by its own ideological perspective in its policy toward the Middle East, and wrongly viewed Arab nationalists in the Cold War as being under the control of the Soviet Union, placing them in

the “enemy camp.” Furthermore, Israel’s own strong adherence to Zionist ideology, inherently incompatible with Arab nationalist ideology, directly put it at odds with Syria. Like Syria, Israel’s commitment to ideology was also shaped by its own historical narrative. Israel’s ideological motivation was evident when it capitalized on the 1967 war to expand its borders, not just for security reasons, but also to encompass more of what it considered as Greater Israel. This had implications for negotiations in Part III, for while Israel was prepared to sacrifice the Sinai, which it had occupied as a strategic bargaining tool, it was not willing to sacrifice the Golan Heights, which was argued by Israel’s right wing to hold religious significance. Thus, it was clear that Israel was often as inflexible, if not more, than Syria in maintaining what it believed were nonnegotiable, ideological principles. For Syria, knowing that its staunch enemy was pursuing (and succeeding in) its ideological goals strengthened the relevance and perceived necessity of its own ideological principles.

However, while there appeared to be no potential for change among Israel’s political establishment, there were signs that the United States could have pursued alternative strategies that would have diluted some of Syria’s ideological opposition against it. There was a regular tug of war over ideas and strategy between the State Department and the president’s office. Under the Truman administration, the State Department stressed the importance of providing aid to Syria in order to build its infrastructure post independence, under Eisenhower it discussed the need to understand Arab concerns beyond the Cold War context, and after the 1967 war it questioned the United States’ close relationship with Israel and argued for the resumption of economic and cultural ties with Syria. In all these cases the president’s office overruled the State Department’s recommendations. However, this divergence was reduced under Bush with the end of the Cold War, when both sides in Washington were interested in rapprochement with Syria. Although it did not remove the salience of ideology altogether, it did a great deal to reduce the confrontational element in Syria’s ideological policy toward the United States

- (iii) Individual and collective memory: The role of personalities, and how they interacted with systemic factors, was a crucial element in sustaining the importance of ideology in Syria’s foreign policy. It is unsurprising that many of Syria’s politicians and military leaders after independence adopted an Arab nationalist position, since all of them had lived under French colonial rule. The most significant leader to have had an impact on the continued salience of ideology

in Syria's policy toward the United States was Hafez Asad. Growing up under colonial rule instilled in him a strong Arab nationalist outlook; he also felt a personal enmity with Israel, having participated in every Arab-Israeli war and particularly after the loss of the Golan Heights, when he was the minister of defense. His experiences and ideological motives influenced the Ba'ath, the military, and Syria's policies as he rose in power. As well as ensuring important continuities, his interpretation of ideology instigated changes, shifting power from the theorists to the militarists in the party, and replacing Jadid's radical approach with a pragmatic one.

Of course, those at the very top were not the only ones with the capacity to direct foreign policy, and Syria's military had an interesting and complex role to play despite the cult of leadership surrounding Asad. Staunchly ideological and opposed to Israel, the military elements in the Syrian regime held it as their duty to constantly remind the leadership of Syria's Arab nationalist commitments. Part I outlined two occasions when Syria had leaders who took clear pro-American positions: General Husni Za'im in 1949 and Ma'mun Kuzbari in 1963. Both regimes were short-lived—Za'im, who also signed a truce with Israel, was assassinated a few months into power, while the Kuzbari regime was overthrown by the Ba'athist coup. The unpopularity of both regimes was shown to be directly related to their support for the United States at the expense of Syria's ideological principles, and it was the army that took direct action against them.

And finally public opinion also needs to be considered as a factor in Syria's ideological policy. While the constraints placed on US policy by domestic opinion and lobby groups have received more attention in academic literature, the influence of Syrian public opinion on the regime's ideological position and policy toward the United States has at times been dismissed as irrelevant. However, for the periods under study in this book, there was a significant connection between the Syrian regime's position vis-à-vis the United States and the public mood. A powerful convergence of public and government animosity toward Israel and mistrust of the United States has meant that whereas in other aspects of politics the regime was able to bypass domestic opinion, there remained a rare normative adherence to popular demands on Arab nationalist concerns. Even when Syria came under the rule of leaders who abandoned the ideological agenda, there was a continuity of Arab nationalist opinion among the general public and the military before, during, and after these brief periods. It is in fact remarkable that there was so much continuity in Syrian foreign policy toward the United States despite such a lack of domestic political cohesion prior to the presidency of Hafez Asad.

Of course, Syria's decisions were not *dictated* by public opinion—Asad's actions during the Gulf War demonstrated he was willing to take risks, but only as far as it would also produce tangible benefits, not just materially but also in terms of Syria's ideational goals. When a deal with Israel appeared possible in 2000, the public in support of the military's position reacted with hostility to the notion that any compromise would be made to the principle of full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan—thus, unsurprisingly, certain concessions that were reported to have been offered by Damascus were then categorically taken off the agenda when Asad met with Clinton in Geneva.¹ While Asad accurately calculated the public mood and its continued attachment to ideological principles, Anwar Sadat and later Yasser Arafat can be seen to have miscalculated in this area—their publics were not yet prepared to abandon their ideological goals, and the leaders suffered the loss of legitimacy as a result. Thus, the three components of leadership, political and military elite, plus public opinion played into Syria's continued adherence to ideology in foreign policy.

While the above conditions remained constant, the following areas saw significant changes to the original circumstances, at times leading Syria's foreign policy to become distanced from its ideological principles.

- (iv) Global events: Part I addressed how the onset of the Cold War affected events in the Middle East. However, while it was a new phenomenon on the international scene, it did not overturn the basic dynamics of Middle East politics but exacerbated them. Cold War rivalry led to superpower intervention and at times dragged the region into a global conflict, but it also enabled those states that chose not to align with the United States to balance against American hegemony by allying with the USSR. This enabled Arab states during the Cold War to retain a great deal of agency, for as long as the Soviet Union was willing to sell them arms and lend political support, the Arab nationalists were not compelled to turn to the United States.

Given this context, the greatest level of change in US-Syrian relations occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many at the time predicted that the demise of the USSR, the rise of the United States as the sole superpower, and the apparent mood of reconciliation in the Middle East would reduce the salience of ideology. With US power greatly enhanced, the propensity of weaker states seeking to align with the United States and its allies seemingly increased. As outlined in Chapter 7, the new context of unipolarity placed an implicit pressure on Syria to comply and take actions against a fellow Arab state. It did not do so on the basis of financial

incentives, but Syria did seek political advantages and an end to isolation as a result. It is notable that the United States left Jordan completely in the cold after the Gulf War as payback for its support of Iraq; in turn, Jordan had to go to even greater lengths to prove its loyalty to the United States to restore relations. In giving its support to the United States when American power was at its zenith, Syria avoided further isolation or the embarrassment of having to show contrition afterward. Similarly, during the Madrid process, Syria did feel the extra pressure to cooperate with the United States, more than it otherwise would have. These events on their own however would not have been enough to sway Syria away from its ideological position—for this, we need to look to the last contingent factor.

- (v) The role of regional allies: This condition had a varying impact on the salience of ideology for Syria. When Syria adopted Arab nationalist policies after independence, it shared ideological goals with a number of Arab actors. The Palestinians were at the forefront of Arab grievances against colonialism and the West, whereas Egypt joined the Arab nationalist camp after the Free Officers revolution in 1952. Iraq followed suit in 1963, though its relationship with Syria was fraught with power-political rivalry. Jordan showed willingness to join in the Arab nationalist cause when it suited it, but without offering much further commitment. Given that Arab nationalism claimed to defend the rights of all Arabs and the Middle East against external interference, some level of convergence of ideological goals across the region was important. The first blow that was dealt to Syria's Arab nationalist policies was Egypt's alignment with the United States and its peace with Israel. However, while it was a significant setback, it did not diminish Syria's adherence to ideology.

What did eventually undermine the relevance of ideology in Syria's strategy was yet another defection from the Arab nationalist cause and the fight against Zionism. But this time the defectors were the Palestine Liberation Organization. This struck at the core principles of Arab nationalist ideology, which was deeply attached to the Palestinian cause. It is true that at the regional level, Syria was as capable as other Arab states in working against the Palestinians (seen by its actions in Lebanon). However, in relation to the United States and Israel, Syria had for decades spoken out not only against its own occupation but also that of the Palestinians; for years, Syria had argued for Palestinian representation in the peace process. Thus, when Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo agreement, it not only was seen as a grave betrayal by Syria, but it also appeared to remove the need for a comprehensive settlement.

This demonstrates that the conditions conferring relevance to ideologies can change, and this indeed forced Syria to reassess its goals. Hence, we see that after Oslo in 1993, Syria was far readier to consider a separate deal with Israel, and went much further in negotiations than it had on previous occasions. Some commentators have highlighted this development as an example of Syria's abandonment of ideology and pursuit of realist self-interest at the expense of its Arab neighbors. Certainly, "realist" politics were at play here, but it should also be noted that throughout the process until the Oslo Accords in 1993, Syria consistently called for a comprehensive settlement, coordination of Arab efforts, and Israel's withdrawal not just from Syrian territory, but from all Arab territory. By the end, however, it was the Syrians who were left behind by their Arab partners before they too then searched for a separate deal with Israel.² Thus, the strength of ideology waned, not because the principles were no longer pertinent, but because the feasibility of realizing certain goals had dramatically diminished after the loss of key allies, particularly the Palestinians, while the changing global situation meant the United States was the only power through which any mediation could occur.

And yet, just as the salience of ideology could be undermined with the loss of fellow Arab nationalist actors, it could also be revived with the emergence of new allies. Hence Syria returned to a more ideologically inclined policy toward the United States after the increased activism of Hamas in the mid-1990s. By giving sanctuary to Hamas leaders and by giving its strong support to Hizbullah in Lebanon, Syria knew well that it would incur the anger of the United States and rekindle much of the hostility that had existed in the past. And yet the appeal of a renewed ideological momentum in the region, with the emergence of new allies, had a significant influence on Syria's foreign policy.

What the above summary demonstrates is that conditions facilitating continuities in US-Syrian relations have become embedded over time, but there is also evidence that there is the *potential* for change. What, therefore, are the conditions needed for such a change? For an underlying, structural change to take place in US-Syrian relations, three significant conditions would need to be altered.

The first is the historical context and the role of opposing ideologies. Should external interference and perceived exploitation of the region end, and Israel's occupation of Arab land be overturned, the primary conditions for Syrian hostility toward Israel and in turn the United States might dissipate. This would not necessarily mean that there would be an abandonment of Syria's ideology, but that the conditions within which it gains the most relevance and is practiced would have changed dramatically.

A second type of change might occur if all the above conditions remained the same with the exception of the position of the United

States. Thus, if the United States no longer gave its support to Israel, and challenged Israeli policy, there would very likely be an improvement in US-Syrian relations.

And finally, a third type of change to US-Syrian relations would see the status quo remaining, except for a sudden change in ideological sentiment, either by the Syrian public or by the leadership. Thus, if there were to be a major shift in public opinion, or in the values held by the Syrian leadership, either of which no longer sought to resist Israel and to challenge US hegemony, there would arguably be an improvement in US-Syrian relations. Of course, the short-term likelihood of all three scenarios is highly contestable, but they remain the possible avenues for change in Syrian-American relations.

Future Research and Final Conclusions

This study did not look so far ahead; the historical analysis stops at the death of Hafez Asad in 2000. Nevertheless, there is ample potential for this study to be continued and extended to analyze US-Syrian relations under Bashar Asad and beyond.

Some of the factors that ensured that ideology remained salient under Hafez Asad have arguably receded, thereby potentially reducing the strength of the Arab nationalist component in Syrian foreign policy—for example, Hafez Asad's personal enmity toward Israel and adherence to Arab nationalism stemmed from his own personal experiences, particularly having fought in the Arab-Israeli wars. Such historical experiences cannot weigh on Bashar Asad exactly as they did on his father. How does this impact on the role of ideology in his foreign policy, or that of a future successor?

Conversely, some of the cornerstones of US-Syrian relations have remained the same since 2000, namely Washington's strong support for Israel. Moreover, there have emerged additional components to US-Syrian hostility, such as America's "War on Terror" after 9/11, its invasion of Iraq in 2003, Syria's withdrawal from, but continued involvement in, Lebanon, and finally escalating mistrust and animosity since the start of the Syrian uprisings in 2011. While 9/11 was a global event that briefly produced an opportunity for improved US-Syrian relations, similar to the post-Cold War period, it soon faded with the emergence of the Bush doctrine and the Iraq War. These events, along with the second Intifada in 2000, and particularly US support for Syrian opposition groups and its threatened intervention in 2013, served to strengthen the role of Arab nationalism in the regime's foreign policy. These developments have sparked a new phase

of US-Syrian hostility, which at times has been even more combustible than some of the periods explored in this book.

Notes

1. Rabinovich, *Waging Peace*, pp. 130–133.
2. Muallem, *Fresh Light*, p. 89; Author's interview with Imad Moustapha, Syrian ambassador to the United States, Washington, DC, June 2009; Author's interview with Flynt Leverett, former CIA senior analyst during the Clinton administration, Washington, DC, June 2009.

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